

Kingship and Commonweal : Political  
Thought and Ideology in Reformation Scotland

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DECLARATION

I, Roger A. Mason, hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and is entirely my own work.

Signed:

Date: 15 March 1988

ABSTRACT

In general terms, this thesis may be characterized as a study of the ideological context in which the Scottish Reformation took place. More specifically, however, it has three complementary and overlapping aims. Firstly, it is intended to provide detailed exegeses of the political thought of the major theorists of the period (e.g. John Mair, John Knox and George Buchanan) with reference not only to the mainstreams of European intellectual history with which they are usually associated, but also to the Scottish political and ideological background from which they are too often divorced. Secondly, in order to fill in the latter context, the thesis aims through an analysis of a wide range of literary and record material to explore the political beliefs and ideals of the Scottish community at large as these developed in the century or so preceding the Reformation in response to changing social, political and religious circumstances. Finally, the third aim of the thesis is to reassess both the rebellion of the Protestant Congregation in 1559 and the deposition of Mary Stewart in 1567 in the light of the new understanding of their ideological context which the foregoing has sought to establish. An important conclusion to emerge from this research is that, despite the well-attested radicalism of Knox and Buchanan, the Scots in general were highly conservative in their political attitudes and, perhaps contrary to received opinion, extremely reluctant to rebel against the established authorities. It is argued, in fact, that Scottish political thinking was dominated during this period by essentially medieval concepts of kingship and the commonweal which made no explicit provision for either resistance or tyrannicide and which made it difficult for many Scots

either to accept the radical ideologies of Knox and Buchanan or to countenance the revolutionary upheavals of the Reformation era. In line with much current research, therefore, the thesis concludes that Protestantism was established in Scotland on a far more uncertain and precarious basis than is sometimes assumed and that its survival after 1560 depended to a large extent on English support for a reforming party which at least initially had little backing within Scotland itself.



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NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS ETC.

Abbreviations : The following abbreviations have been used throughout the text:

E.E.T.S.	=	Early English Text Society
S.H.S.	=	Scottish History Society
S.T.S.	=	Scottish Text Society

Footnotes : Footnote references to both primary and secondary sources are given in full on the first occasion of their use in each chapter. Thereafter, in the case of primary sources, citations conform to the short-titles as set out in the 'List of Abbreviated Titles of the Printed Sources of Scottish History to 1560', published as a supplement to the Scottish Historical Review, October 1963. In the case of secondary sources, after the first reference, the author's surname and an easily recognizable short-title are cited. Full publication details can also be found in the bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Quotations : In quoting from primary sources in sixteenth century Scots and English, only such (silent) alterations to the orthography and punctuation have been made as seemed necessary to facilitate reading or elucidate the sense. The middle Scots 'yog' is rendered 'z'.

Translations : Unless otherwise stated, translations from the Latin are those of the translator of the edition as cited in the footnotes.

Dates : All dates are given in the New Style, the year being deemed to begin on the 1st January.

## Introduction

The Scottish Reformation - like many other aspects of Scottish history - is currently the subject of a good deal of revisionist discussion and interpretation. In recent years, for example, a number of historians have made major contributions to our understanding of the complex and critical events of the two decades following 1550.<sup>1</sup> In the light of this research, facile assumptions regarding the irretrievable decay of the Catholic Church and the irresistible rise of Protestantism have at long last been consigned to oblivion. Instead, a more realistic picture has emerged in which the crisis of the Reformation is set against and interpreted in terms of a variegated pattern of socio-political as well as religious pressures and aspirations. The details of this pattern will be discussed in due course. At this stage it is necessary only to note that the revised picture is as yet far from complete and that there are many areas which still await detailed research. One such area - and by no means the least important of them - is the ideological context of the Reformation and in particular the role of political ideas in motivating and legitimating the conflicts of the period. Of course, although frequently misconstrued, the ideas of the prominent political theorists of these years - John Knox and George Buchanan - have nevertheless often

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1. The most important of these works are I. B. Cowan, The Scottish Reformation : Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland (London, 1982); Michael Lynch, Edinburgh and the Reformation (Edinburgh, 1981); and Jenny Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community : Scotland 1470-1625 (London, 1981). In addition, two older works made significant contributions to the current revisionist climate: Gordon Donaldson, The Scottish Reformation (Cambridge, 1960), and Essays on the Scottish Reformation, ed. David McRoberts (Glasgow, 1962).



received detailed commentary.<sup>1</sup> But little effort has been made to recover the beliefs and values of the political community at large or to consider the ways in which ideological assumptions and preconceptions may have influenced the behaviour of those who participated - or chose not to participate - in the crucial events unfolding in their midst.<sup>2</sup> The present study is an attempt to fill these lacunae in the historiography of the Scottish Reformation.

In seeking to do so, it adopts two different but complementary lines of approach. In the first place, much of what follows takes the form of a descriptive analysis of a wide range of material which may be loosely categorized as 'political literature'. Under this heading is included any work which either implicitly or explicitly provides evidence of how Scots in the period up to and including the Reformation perceived and conceptualized their political environment. Consequently, it includes works of poetry, history and theology as well as of political theory and polemic. Of course, by its very nature, not all of this material is of equal value and the works of certain individuals inevitably stand out as being particularly worthy of detailed treatment. Half of the following ten chapters, therefore, are devoted exclusively

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1. The best analyses of the formal political theory of the period are undoubtedly those of J. H. Burns. My immense debt to his numerous articles on sixteenth century Scottish political thinkers (for which see the bibliography of secondary sources) is only partially and inadequately reflected in the number of occasions on which they are cited in footnotes.
  2. An honourable exception to this is Arthur H. Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI : The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture (Edinburgh, 1979). Although Williamson's work is focused on the post-Reformation period, it says much of relevance to the period covered in this study and I should once again acknowledge a debt more extensive than is revealed by explicit references.

to extended exegeses of the political writings of five individual authors. Up to a point, these select themselves : no study of the ideological context of the Scottish Reformation could afford to ignore either Knox or Buchanan, while it would be decidedly unwise to discount the contribution of a political theorist of the stature of John Mair (or Major). The choice of the other figures who have received special attention - Hector Boece and Sir David Lindsay of the Mount - is perhaps not quite so self-explanatory. However, while neither was a political thinker of any originality, both did write works which, for reasons that will become apparent at a later stage, are believed to be particularly revealing of the ideological matrix in which the Reformation took place. It is hoped that these five chapters will prove of interest in their own right and that they can be read with profit by historians of political thought who have no specialist interest in the Scottish Reformation as such.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, although they may be read as discrete analyses of the political thought of specific individuals, these chapters are also designed to contribute to the larger purpose of this study. To a considerable

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1. Obviously this applies with particular force to the chapters on Mair, Knox and Buchanan whose various contributions to the development of European political thought have long been recognized in such general text-books as J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1928), and Pierre Mesnard, L'essor de la philosophie politique au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris, 1936). More recently, their significance has if anything been enhanced in Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge, 1978). In the light of this, I have not hesitated to comment on aspects of their thought which strictly speaking might be considered to fall outwith the scope of this study. It is my belief in fact that the Scottish orientated approach adopted here adds an essential contextual dimension to the interpretation of their writings which is inevitably missing from more general works on the history of political thought.



degree, therefore, their structure and content are geared towards a more wide-ranging inquiry into the beliefs and ideals current among the Scottish political community at large. To this end, they are deliberately interspersed among a number of other chapters whose primary purpose is to explore the nature and limits of the political vocabulary in general use among Reformation Scots. At this point, however, our first line of approach - the descriptive analysis of texts - intersects with a second - the delineation of their linguistic context - and it is to an explanation of the latter that we must briefly turn our attention.

In the past fifteen years, a number of historians of political ideas - most notably John Dunn, Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock - have emphasized that an understanding of the political thought of a past age depends to a large extent on an understanding of the language system in which it was articulated.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, they have argued that the complex web of rules and conventions which necessarily governs the use of any public language inevitably also circumscribes and controls the range of meanings which can be communicated through the use of that language. It follows from this that, in order to recover the true historical meaning of a past utterance, it is essential to locate it in its appropriate linguistic context and to decode

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1. See in particular John Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas', Philosophy, XLII (1968), 85-104; Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', History and Theory, VIII (1969), 3-53; *ibid.*, 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action', Political Theory, II (1974), 277-303; and J. G. A. Pocock, Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History (London, 1972), esp. 3-41. This is not a comprehensive list of their methodological writings, but includes only those which I have found particularly helpful in formulating my own (fairly pragmatic) views on the subjects they discuss.

it in the light of the conventions or sets of conventions which prevailed at the time it was uttered. This argument was initially formulated by Dunn and, in more elaborate terms, by Skinner in order to provide historians of political ideas with a truly historical method of interpreting the 'classic texts' of political philosophy from Plato to Marx.<sup>1</sup> As Pocock has subsequently shown, however, it has a broader, more sociological application which is particularly relevant to the aims of this study. He agrees with Dunn and Skinner that it is the historian's first task to identify the 'language' employed by a particular author and 'to show how it functioned paradigmatically to prescribe what he might say and how he might say it'. But he goes on from there to explore the possibility of using this approach to recover the conceptual world, not simply of a specific individual, but of the political society to which he belonged. As he points out, most early modern societies 'possessed a number of distinguishable idioms, diverse in both their cultural origins and their linguistic functions, with which to discuss questions of politics'. There is no reason, therefore, why historians of such societies should not seek to identify the whole range of languages available to a given community at a given time and 'proceed to study them in depth, detecting both their cultural and social origins and the modes, linguistic and political, of assumption, implication and ambiguity which they contained and helped to

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1. For a useful discussion of the ideas of Dunn, Skinner and Pocock in the context of the historiography of the history of political ideas, see John G. Gunnell, Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), esp. 96-103.



convey'.<sup>1</sup> The benefits of such an approach will be readily apparent : not only is it a means of establishing the precise linguistic context in terms of which the writings of a particular author must be interpreted, but it is also a means of anatomizing the complex linguistic - and hence conceptual - universe of a particular political society. As such, it is an approach peculiarly well suited to fulfilling the aims of this inquiry.

Even the most cursory reading of the mass of political literature generated by the Reformation crisis in Scotland will reveal that there were, in fact, two quite distinct political languages in general use at that time.<sup>2</sup> The first of these was fundamentally religious in character, was centred on the idea of a covenant with God and is hard to dissociate from the name of John Knox. The second was basically secular in orientation, was dominated by the idea of the commonweal of the realm and can properly be regarded as the language in which contemporary Scots habitually described and discussed their political

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1. Pocock, Politics, Language and Time, 25-6. With specific reference to Pocock, Skinner has warned against 'the overenthusiastic adoption of a completely sociological approach, through which the object of analysis becomes nothing less than the whole gamut of "languages" in which a nation articulates its political experience over time'. His caution, however, does not seem to stem from any problem inherent in Pocock's approach, but rather from his own belief that 'a certain primacy still deserves to be assigned to studying the traditional canon of classic texts'. See 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action', 280-1.
  2. As regards identifying these languages, my own experience tends to confirm Pocock's observation to the effect that: 'If at this stage we are asked how we know the languages adumbrated really existed, or how we recognize them when we see them, we should be able to reply empirically : that the languages in question are simply there, that they form individually recognizable patterns and styles, and that we get to know them by learning to speak them, to think in their patterns and styles until we know that we are speaking them and can predict in what directions speaking them is carrying us' (Politics, Language and Time, 26).

experiences. Although the former will receive its due share of attention, it is with the history of the latter that much of what follows is concerned. For not only does it constitute the linguistic context in terms of which a number of important texts ought primarily to be read, but an analysis of its structure and implications will also provide access to the conceptual apparatus by means of which the majority of Reformation Scots ordered and interpreted their political environment. To grasp its main features, however, we must trace its development over time and see it as part of a broader social fabric which was itself subject to historical change. For that reason, our inquiry must begin in the medieval period, for it was then that the patterns of thought which were embodied and articulated in the language of the commonweal first originated and took shape. We can then proceed to examine how these modes of thought were developed, criticized, modified and challenged in the first half of the sixteenth century and thus to build up a progressively more complete picture of the ideological context in which the Reformation took place. Finally, it is hoped that in the light of this we will be in a better position to see the ways in which political beliefs and values did indeed influence the behaviour of the Scottish political community in the late 1550's and 1560's and to delineate how this in turn influenced the course and resolution of the Reformation crisis itself.

Part I

CHIVALRY AND CITIZENSHIP



## Chapter One

### The Medieval Inheritance

#### I

Despite considerable diversity in ethnic origin, language and culture, Scotland had attained a remarkable degree of political unity in the high middle ages.<sup>1</sup> Under the capable and aggressive rule of the royal house of Canmore, the country had gradually been transformed from a primitive tribal kingship into a sophisticated feudal monarchy. It was a process based on a revolution in landholding - the spread of feudal tenure and the concomitant recognition that land was held of the king in return for military service - but entailing much more extensive social and political repercussions than this might at first sight suggest. For by implication and extension, feudalization also placed the king at the apex of a hierarchically ordered society from whom not only all land but also all justice and lordship were ultimately derived. Consequently, it enormously enhanced the power and prestige of monarchy and might even, in alliance with the religious symbolism of the coronation ceremony, endow it with the attributes of divinity. Before 1329, of course, Scottish kings were neither crowned nor anointed and their office never acquired the sacral character of its French or English counterparts. Despite efforts to have the pope grant them the rights of coronation and unction enjoyed by other western European monarchies, Scottish kings continued simply to be

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1. On the background to what follows, see in particular A. A. M. Duncan, Scotland : The Making of the Kingdom (Edinburgh, 1975), and G. W. S. Barrow, Kingship and Unity : Scotland 1000-1306 (London, 1981).

enthroned in an inauguration ceremony based on ancient Pictish custom.<sup>1</sup> Yet if it was denied solemn religious sanctification, Scottish kingship was nevertheless able to tap sources of legitimacy which, if less than impressive in a European context, were of more than negligible importance to the Scots themselves. At the inauguration of Alexander III in 1249, for example, an ageing Highlander recited a genealogy of the new king which traced the royal line of Canmore back to a Greek prince named Gathelus and his wife, the eponymous Scota, daughter of Pharaoh.<sup>2</sup> This public demonstration of Alexander's lineal descent from the alleged progenitors of the Scottish people both confirmed the legitimacy of his claim to the kingship of the Scots and served to remind those present of the antiquity and continuous history of their race. In other words, as well as reinforcing the authority of the king, it also emphasized the ancient and autonomous origins of his kingdom. To a people whose status as an independent political community was subject to doubt and question, this was of much more than merely ceremonial significance. The royal genealogy was also a means of legitimating their claim to an independent existence under a king subject to no higher power but God alone.

The importance of this stemmed from the fact that ever since the tenth century English kings had intermittently laid claim to feudal

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1. For details of the ceremony, see Duncan, Scotland : The Making of the Kingdom, 552-8.
  2. See Johannis de Fordun, Chronica Gentis Scotorum, ed. W. F. Skene and trans. F. J. H. Skene (Edinburgh, 1871-2), i, 293-5; when the genealogy was first put together is not known, but an earlier version has been attributed to the reign of William the Lion (1165-1214); see Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots, and other Early Memorials of Scottish History, ed. W. F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1867), 144-5.

superiority over the Scottish realm. Indeed, on several occasions - perhaps most notably by the terms of the Treaty of Falaise of 1174 - Scottish kings had actually done homage to their English counterparts and thus recognized (in theory at least) the latter's lordship over the northern kingdom. It was largely for this reason that Scottish kings were denied the privileges of coronation and unction : their petitions were bitterly opposed at the papal curia by English arguments to the effect that, as a vassal kingdom, the realm of Scotland ought not to be accorded the marks of true kingship.<sup>1</sup> Such arguments drew support, moreover, not only from recent examples of Scottish submissions, but also from a version of the early history of Britain composed by the twelfth century Welsh cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth. In his Historia Regum Britonum, for example, Geoffrey had argued that the Britons were descendants of Brutus, great-grandson of the Trojan Aeneas, who had settled in Britain around 1170 B.C. and who on his deathbed had divided his kingdom among his three sons, the eldest inheriting England, the second Scotland and the youngest Wales. Albanactus, the king of Scotland, however, had died without heirs and his portion had thereby reverted to his older brother, the king of England. According to Geoffrey, in other words, the Scottish kingdom had from the very beginning been subordinate to that of England. Furthermore, as he went on to relate, its dependent status had frequently been reaffirmed by such heroic figures as King Arthur whose vast sixth century empire encompassed not only the British Isles - Scotland being a tributary kingdom - but also Scandinavia and Gaul.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Duncan, Scotland : The Making of the Kingdom, 526, 554.

2. Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, ed. and trans. Lewis Thorpe (Penguin edtn., Harmondsworth, 1966), 75, 212ff, and passim.



Risible as they now may sound, these tales nevertheless form part of an English historiographical tradition which, fathered by Geoffrey, was to prove immensely influential throughout the middle ages and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Far from being of merely academic interest, moreover, the so-called Brut tradition proved a powerful ideological weapon in the hands of English kings whose imperialist ambitions led them to contemplate the subjugation of Scotland. Edward I, for example, drew heavily on Galfridian lore when charged by Pope Boniface VIII to justify his aggression towards the Scots in the 1290's.<sup>2</sup> Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Scots felt obliged to reply in kind and to elaborate a national myth which would effectively counter the imperialism of the Brut tradition. It is in this context that the significance of the royal genealogy becomes fully apparent, for it was by reference to their descent from Scota rather than Brutus that the Scots sought to refute Geoffrey's interpretation of their early history. Thus in response to Edward I's arguments, the Scots informed Boniface VIII that they were descendants of a Pharaoh's daughter, that they had come to Scotland by way of Ireland and that they had no connection whatsoever with either Brutus or

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1. For valuable discussions of the tradition, see T. D. Kendrick, British Antiquity (London, 1950), and Laura Keeler, Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Later Latin Chroniclers 1300-1500 (Berkeley, 1946).
  2. See, for example, Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174-1328 : Some Selected Documents, ed. and trans. E. L. G. Stones (Oxford, 1965), 192ff.

Albanactus.<sup>1</sup> In short, they asserted unequivocally that there was nothing in the early history of Scotland to support the arrogant pretensions of the English monarchy.

The legend of Scota was of ancient Irish origin and variations on the story first begin to appear in Scottish sources in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>2</sup> Despite the ideological uses to which it was quickly put, however, the myth was not in fact set out in detail until late in the fourteenth century. Then, between 1384 and 1387, John of Fordun (probably a chantry priest in the cathedral church of Aberdeen) composed the first full-length history of Scotland, the Chronica Gentis Scotorum. In it Fordun endeavoured to collate the various versions of the kingdom's legendary origins and to establish a coherent chronological framework for its subsequent history. He did so, moreover, with one eye firmly fixed on Geoffrey of Monmouth. Thus, according to Fordun's account, the progenitors of the Scottish race were a Greek prince named Gathelus and Scota, the daughter of Pharaoh, whom he married shortly before Moses delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt. In the wake of the Pharaoh's destruction in the Red Sea (c.1500 B.C.), Gathelus and Scota were forced to flee from Egypt with their family and retainers and, after sailing the Mediterranean for a time, they eventually settled in Spain. From Spain,

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1. See the 'Processus Baldredi' in Chron. Picts-Scots, 271-84, esp. 279-80. For the background to the pleading at the papal curia, see G. W. S. Barrow, Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland (2nd edtn., Edinburgh, 1976), 162-8. Cf. The Declaration of Arbroath 1320, ed. and trans. Sir James Fergusson (Edinburgh, 1970), 7, where a similar historical argument was used to legitimate Scottish claims to independence.

2. The sources and development of the Scottish version of the myth have never been examined in detail, but for a useful introductory survey, see William Matthews, 'The Egyptians in Scotland: The Political History of a Myth', Viator, I (1970), 289-306.



their descendants colonized first Ireland and then Dalriada (Argyll) in the west of Scotland in the fifth century B.C. From being a colony, Dalriada was eventually erected into an independent kingdom under Fergus, son of Ferchard, in 330 B.C. This kingdom, Fordun maintained, endured for seven centuries until the Romans, in league with the Picts, overthrew it in 360 A.D. But the breach was only temporary, for after 43 years Fergus II, son of Erc, restored the kingdom in 403 and the Dalriadic line of kings had ruled in unbroken succession from that day until Fordun's own.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, this story was a deliberate attempt to counter and refute the imperialist history emanating from the English court. The Scottish kingdom was, it implied, among the oldest in Europe and its independence - unlike that of England - was unsullied by either conquest or feudal submission. Throughout his account, moreover, Fordun was at pains to expose what he called 'the foolish babbling of the British [i.e. Anglo-Welsh] people'<sup>2</sup> whenever it impugned the integrity of the Scottish realm. Despite using Geoffrey on many occasions as a source, he categorically denied that the Albanactus of the Brut tradition had anything to do with Scotland, was eloquently silent regarding the Arthurian empire and, although conceding that William the Lion did homage to the English king in 1174, carefully documented his subsequent release from any and all feudal obligations.<sup>3</sup> Where it was likely to diminish credibility in the high antiquity and continuous independence of the Scottish kingdom, the Brut tradition was either studiously ignored or painstakingly refuted by the patriotic

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1. Chron. Fordun, ii, 1, 6-7, 9-28, 67-8, 78-9.

2. Ibid., ii, 21.

3. Ibid., ii, 35-6, 102-3, 267-8.

chronicler in the north. In effect, Fordun had elaborated a Scottish national epos which, paralleling that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, could be used to counter the latter's Anglocentric interpretation of early British history.

The importance of Fordun's achievement is most clearly reflected in the fact that his chronicle provided the basic outline of Scotland's early history for the majority of Scottish historians until the eighteenth century. Certainly, in the fifteenth century, most Scottish chronicles were little more than abridgements of or supplements to the Scotichronicon (as Fordun's work became known) as continued by Walter Bower early in the century.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Pluscarden, for example, written about 1460, was an abridgement designed for those too busy to 'lend their ears for any length of time to so bulky a volume as ... the Great Chronicle',<sup>2</sup> while the manuscript known as The Auchinleck Chronicle is headed 'ane schorte memoriale of ye Scottis corniklis for addicioun' - for addition, presumably, to the Scotichronicon.<sup>3</sup> There are also extant some brief fifteenth century manuscripts which, drawing on Fordun and Bower, were evidently aimed more specifically and explicitly at countering English pretensions as embodied in the Brut tradition. One such, known as the Scottis Originale and probably written around 1460,<sup>4</sup> is

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1. Joannis de Fordun Scotichronicon, cum Supplementis et Continuatione Walteri Boweri, ed. Walter Goodall (Edinburgh, 1759).

2. Liber Pluscardensis, ed. and trans. F. J. H. Skene (Edinburgh, 1877-80), ii, 2-3.

3. Printed in The Asloan Manuscript, ed. W. A. Craigie (S.T.S., 1923-25), i, 215-44.

4. Printed in *ibid.*, i, 185-95. An earlier version of the same piece is printed in The Bannatyne Miscellany (Bannatyne Club, 1827-55), iii, 35-43. The editor of the Asloan version believed them to be independent translations of the same Latin original (see Asloan MS, i, vii).

a useful example of the blatant ideological purpose behind the deployment of the national myth. The anonymous author begins by rehearsing the legend of Gathelus and Scota and insists (for reasons of one-upmanship departing somewhat from Fordun's account) that the Scots arrived in Dalriada 'lang tyme or [= before] Troye was destroyed and or Brutus was borne'.<sup>1</sup> He insists further that the Scots have never been subject to any foreign power and that Arthur was a tyrant who usurped the throne from its legitimate occupant, Mordred, a Scot.<sup>2</sup> He then sums up what we may take to be the primary ideological thrust of much medieval (and later) Scottish historiography:

And supposs Scotland was langtyme wexit with weire of diuers nacionis, that is to say, Romanis, Brettonis, Saxonis, Danys, Pictis and Normanis, neuertheless we Scottis men put thaim ay out throu cruell force and battell ... Sa that we may say this day, be verray suthfastness, thar was neuer land - nor is no land nor nacioun - so fre bygane of all the world nor has standing so lang tyme in fredome as we Scottis in Scotland. Ffor we haue bene xviij hundreth zeire in conquest nor neuer was dantit be no nacioun of strange countre or king to this daye, bot evir wndere our kingis of richt lyne descendand fra Gathele and Scota, first inhabitaris of this land, and fra Fergus forsaid till our souerane lord that ryngis now present ...<sup>3</sup>

The historical referents of the Scots were, therefore, not simply independent of those of England but also more ancient, more continuous and more illustrious. This was a state of affairs for which the author of the Book of Pluscarden - apparently a little surprised - could only thank God:

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1. Asloan MS, i, 187.

2. Ibid., i, 189-91.

3. Ibid., i, 193.



... let us give glory to God in the highest, praise after death to those all-conquering and invincible Scotsmen that are no more, and magnify and honour those living ones who worthily and nobly hold, guard and occupy the illustrious throne of Scotland amid such changes in the world, such disasters and harassings, such defeats, battles and warlike exploits, such indescribable assaults by tyrants, likewise such infamous acts of deceit and treachery by traitors : notwithstanding all which, the royal house of Scotland has occupied it with honour and freedom from 330 years and more before Christ's Incarnation to the present day, without change of nationality or subjection of the king's majesty. With what praises, therefore, I may mention these men, I know not; but I set myself to give thanks without ceasing to Almighty God for them.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the vicissitudes of the world and perhaps against all the odds, Scotland remained, as it had always been, an independent community. As symbols of that autonomous origin and development, Gathelus and Scota were to survive as counterweights to Brutus and his sons well into the sixteenth century, while the heroic line of kings - of which we shall hear much more - was still the subject of heated debate in the early eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Pride in the antiquity and invincibility of the Scottish royal line could, of course, often degenerate into undisguised Anglophobia. The Scottis Originale, for example, concludes sourly with an

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1. Chron. Pluscarden, ii, 2 (cf., ii, 55).

2. In fact, Scotland's early history only began to be accurately researched, and the line of kings appreciably foreshortened, after the publication in 1729 of Father Thomas Innes, A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain or Scotland (repr. Edinburgh, 1885). On the historical debates to which this work was a notable contribution, see Douglas Duncan, Thomas Ruddiman : A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century (Edinburgh and London, 1965), Ch.8.

intemperate denunciation of the English as false, treacherous and descended of the devil,<sup>1</sup> while a similarly vituperative manuscript, designed to demonstrate (from their own chronicles) the 'ewill and cursit governance' of the English, dwells with relish on the English kings' alleged descent from incubus demons.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the ground was well prepared for the vengeful and xenophobic outbursts characteristic of Blind Hary's Wallace (1476-8). Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to think that the Scottish political identity was sustained only through vilification of all things English. Intemperate abuse was certainly common, but so too was a more constructive self-image which found expression most notably in the notion of 'freedom'. This idea, while doubtless evolving in response to English aggression, transcended contingent circumstances and developed connotations encompassing more than crude dislike of the southron foe. Indeed, the Latin 'libertas' and its vernacular equivalents 'liberty' and 'freedom' were words of particularly powerful resonance in the political vocabulary of the medieval Scottish community and as such they demand close scrutiny.<sup>3</sup>

## II

The juxtaposition of 'fredome' and 'thrildome', the dominant theme of John Barbour's verse epic The Bruce (1374-5), is characteristic of much of medieval Scottish literature. Barbour's justly famous

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1. Asloan MS, i, 194-6.

2. Printed in *ibid.*, i, 197-214.

3. The importance of the concept is brought out in some detail in G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Idea of Freedom in Late Medieval Scotland', Innes Review, XXX (1979), 16-34.



apostrophe to freedom ('Al fredome is a noble thing!', etc.)<sup>1</sup> and the well-known lines from the Declaration of Arbroath ('It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom ...')<sup>2</sup> are memorable but by no means isolated instances of a common mode of discourse. They can be matched, for example, by similar passages in Fordun's chronicle. On one occasion, when the envoys of the Roman emperor call upon the kings of the Scots and Picts to submit, Fordun has them retort in ringing phrases:

Think not, O Caesar ... that thou canst succeed in leading us astray, to wander in that most loathsome vale of slavery, along a path impassable, crooked, rough, and horrible to every noble-hearted man; leaving the pleasant road of freedom, our birth-right, a road wherein our fathers, sustained by help from the gods, were ever wont to walk straight-forwards, bending neither to the right hand, nor to the left ... For, the freedom our ancestors have handed down to us, which we must cherish above gold and topaze, and which, in our judgment, far beyond all comparison transcends all worldly wealth, and is infinitely more precious than precious stones; which our high-souled forbears have from the beginning nobly, even to the death, preserved untainted for us, their sons - this freedom, we say, shall we likewise, as not having, in our unworthiness, degenerated from their nature, but as strenuously imitating their standard, preserve inviolate for our sons after our death, and transmit to them unspotted by a single jot of slavishness.<sup>3</sup>

Notably, freedom is here praised not simply as a desirable abstraction but as an historical reality intimately related to the moral qualities of those forbears who realized and maintained it. This was an association which Barbour, reminding a later generation of

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1. John Barbour, The Bruce, ed. W. W. Skeat (S.T.S., 1894), Bk.I, ll. 225-36.
  2. Declaration of Arbroath, ed. Fergusson, 9.
  3. Chron. Fordun, ii, 44-5.

its obligation to emulate the virtuous conduct of its ancestors, was equally interested in making. Consequently, he described the heroism of Bruce and prayed:

God grant that thai, that cummyne ar  
Of his ofspring maynteyne the land,  
And hald the folk weill to warrand,  
And maynteme richt and ek laute,  
As weill as in his tyme did he!<sup>1</sup>

Even Andrew of Wyntoun, whose Original Chronicle (c.1420) attempts to locate Scotland in the context of world history and is much more restrained in its patriotism, could easily slip into the same mode of discourse. Describing the prelude to the battle of Roslin in 1302, for example, he had the Scots leaders exhort their troops in the following manner:

Our elderis, quhil thai liffit, than  
Our gret liffyng til ws wan,  
Tharfor zhe sulde al trow and ken  
That zhe ar cummyn of gentil men.  
The sympla[s]t that is our ost withe in  
Has gret gentilis of his kyn;  
Zhe ar al cummyn of aulde [lynage],  
And lordis of fre heretage,  
That had nathynge mare vgsum  
Than for to lif in to thrildome.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Barbour, Bruce, Bk.XIII, ll. 708-12 (cf. Bk.XX, ll. 615-7). Lois A. Ebin, 'John Barbour's Bruce : Poetry, History and Propaganda', Studies in Scottish Literature, IX (1972), 218-42, argues convincingly that the Bruce should be read as 'a mirror directed to the Scottish king and people' - in particular Robert II and his court - and that it was meant as 'a dramatic statement of the principles' which they ought to preserve. My general interpretation of Barbour's work owes a good deal to this important article.
  2. The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun, ed. F. J. Amours (S.T.S., 1903-14), Bk.VIII, ll. 2581-90.

Once again the obligation to maintain freedom derives moral force from its firm identification with virtuous 'elderis'. The concept of freedom was repeatedly historicized in this way and the reasons for its survival were invariably located in the moral qualities of succeeding generations of noble ancestors. In effect, the political community was simultaneously being reminded of both the continuity of its antecedents and the values which had always sustained it.

It was not, however, history alone that justified the Scots in their defence of freedom. Wyntoun, for example, not only insisted that Scottish kings held their patrimony directly 'Off God hym self immediate', but also implied that any struggle to maintain that status would have God's blessing.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, John Barbour, echoing the Declaration of Arbroath, identified the Scots with the biblical Maccabees and asked rhetorically, '... quhar god helpys, quhat may withstand?'<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Bruce's defiant '... we haf the richt; / And for the richt ilk man suld ficht'<sup>3</sup> implied for Barbour much more than the simple prescriptive validity of the Scottish cause. His country's freedom was righteous, not only in the eyes of man, but also in those of God. Such a conviction was, it seems, shared by Fordun when he wrote:

After the withdrawal of the king of England [in 1304], the English nation lorded it in all parts of the kingdom of Scotland, ruthlessly harrying the Scots in sundry and manifold ways, by

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1. Ibid., Bk.VI (Prologue), ll. 15-28 (cf. Bk.VIII, ll. 323-38).
  2. Barbour, Bruce, Bk.I, ll. 445-75; cf. Declaration of Arbroath, ed. Fergusson, 9.
  3. Barbour, Bruce, Bk.XII, ll. 235-6.



insults, stripes, and slaughter, under the awful yoke of slavery. But God, in his mercy, as is the wont of His fatherly goodness, had compassion on the woes, the ceaseless crying and sorrow, of the Scots; so he raised up a saviour and champion unto them - one of their own fellows, to wit, named Robert of Bruce.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Hary's Wallace similarly invoked both history and divine sanction in vindication of Scottish freedom. Beginning with a lament that the 'nobile worthi deid' of 'Our antecessouris' was being forgotten, it goes on to portray Wallace as a messianic hero and martyr inspired to lead a righteous cause and to deliver his countrymen from bondage into freedom.<sup>2</sup> Patently, 'fredome' encompassed more for these authors than Anglophobia masquerading under the guise of patriotism. Intimately associated with the virtues of heroic ancestors, it also connoted the continuity of the righteous struggle to maintain the community's independent existence through the self-conscious emulation of their forbears' virtuous conduct. In effect, the word and its cognate vocabulary persistently emphasized and reinforced the community's political identity, an identity made doubly legitimate by history and divine approval.

It is, of course, impossible to tell with any accuracy how far either the language of freedom or the national myth which lent it credence had penetrated the consciousness of the political community at large. But the absence of any alternative, less explicitly

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1. Chron. Fordun, ii, 330.

2. Hary's Wallace, ed. M. P. McDiarmid (S.T.S., 1968-9), Bk.I, 11. 1-14 and passim. It should, however, be pointed out that Wallace's desire for freedom is often completely overshadowed by his desire to revenge the deaths of his father, brothers and wife.

Anglophobic historiographical tradition and the frequent recurrence of this mode of discourse, suggest that they played a considerable role in determining the attitudes of the Scottish political community in the late medieval period. Further evidence that this was indeed the case may perhaps be deduced from the fate of Arthurian romances in Scotland. In common with the rest of Europe, Scotland read and produced tales of chivalric valour based on the legends of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. As these were, however, derivatives of the Brut tradition (with all its connotations of English imperialism) they presented major ideological difficulties for an author or translator wishing to adapt them for a Scottish audience. Three tales which survive from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, all translations and adaptations of French originals, illuminate the dilemma and reveal the Scots' sensitivity to it.

It is probably no coincidence that two of the tales, Golagros and Gawaine and Lancelot of the Laik, have as their central theme the question of homage, while the third, The Awntyrs off Arthure, revolves around the related problem of legitimate land tenure.<sup>1</sup> At least in part, all three seem designed to evoke patriotic responses by means singularly appropriate to a Scottish context. In Golagros and Gawaine, for example, Arthur high-handedly demands homage of Sir Golagros who has, like his 'doughty elderis' before him, never submitted to any feudal superior. The defiant retort of the valiant and

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1. Lancelot of the Laik, ed. M. M. Gray (S.T.S., 1912); both Golagros and Gawaine and The Awntyrs off Arthure are printed in Scottish Alliterative Poems, ed. F. J. Amours (S.T.S., 1897). Subsequent references are to these editions.

freedom-loving knight to Arthur's demands would doubtless have struck an immediate chord among John Barbour's audience:

Quhill I may my wit wald,  
I think my fredome to hald,  
As my eldaris of ald<sub>1</sub>  
Has done me beforne.

Lancelot of the Laik exploits in similar fashion Scottish fears of feudal overlordship. In this case, when homage is demanded of Arthur himself, he replies in equally familiar and evocative phraseology:

For I as yit, in tymys that ar gone,  
Held neuer lond excep of god alone,  
Nore neuer thinkith til erthly lord to yef [= give]  
Trybut nor rent, als long as I may lef.<sup>2</sup>

From these examples it would appear that Arthurian romance was being couched in the same patriotic language we have encountered in other literary forms. Arthur's determination 'to defend my cuntre & my richt'<sup>3</sup> was, as we have seen, the firm resolve of Scottish chroniclers and poets from Fordun to Blind Hary. Quite clearly, patriotic ideology had penetrated even the rarefied atmosphere of chivalric romanticism.

The Awntyrs off Arthure, although it does not confront the problem of homage so directly, is nevertheless cast in the same mould. Its plot hinges on Arthur's gift of certain lands in the Lowlands of Scotland to Gawain when they rightfully belong to Sir Galleron of Galloway. Galleron, bent on recovering his inheritance, challenges Gawain to single combat and, although finally defeated, so impresses

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1. Golagros and Gawaine, ll. 450-3 (cf. ll. 434-5).

2. Lancelot of the Laik, ll. 560-3.

3. *Ibid.*, l. 671.



Arthur with his valour and magnanimity that he is restored to his lands and released from all feudal obligations. In other words, as in the previous tales, valour in defence of native heritage receives its just reward. Such virtuous conduct would no doubt have commended itself to any society that prized chivalric values, but the Scottish adapters of these stories seem particularly sensitive to its relevance. Moreover, as if to make plain their ideological significance, from none of these tales does Arthur emerge in a flattering light. In the Awntyrs off Arthure he is accused of being covetous and over-ambitious and the imminent collapse of his power is prophesied; in Golagros and Gawaine he is portrayed as high-handed and tyrannical; while in Lancelot of the Laik, although appearing briefly as a patriotic hero, he is later upbraided as an illegitimate usurper, for his arrogance and imperiousness and for the inadequacy of his kingship.<sup>1</sup> As one critic has remarked, there are 'many different portraits of Arthur in medieval literature, but nowhere else is there anything to match the contemptible tyrant who is presented in these Scottish romances'.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Arthur and his knights had fallen victim to the Scots' overwhelming need to assert the autonomy of their kingdom against the imperialism of the Brut tradition. Equally clearly, in chronicle, epic and even in romance, the political community was constantly being reminded - both explicitly and obliquely - of its historic identity and patriotic obligations.

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1. Awntyrs off Arthure, ll. 265-312; Golagros and Gawaine, ll. 292-8; Lancelot of the Laik, ll. 1310-1427, 1461-1541, 1589-1996.

2. Matthews, 'Egyptians in Scotland', 299.

## III

The community's patriotic duties, however, entailed something more than simply defending the realm against foreign invasion. If that is the most consistently obvious feature of the works we have been discussing, it is nevertheless not their only one. Chroniclers and poets were not so obsessed with the external threat to the survival of the realm as to neglect entirely what they deemed necessary for its internal stability. Consequently, they sought with equal diligence to instil in the political elite those virtues which were generally thought essential to the correct governance of the realm. Above all, they sought to educate the king in the duties of his onerous office, duties which involved not only the defence of his patrimony but also the maintenance of domestic peace and order. In short, these works are shot through with assumptions about the nature and function of kingship which, responding to the unfailing didacticism of medieval literature, found frequent expression both in scattered obiter dicta and in more extended comments on princely vice and virtue. To these, moreover, may be added formal treatises on kingship in the speculum principis genre, mirror images of the ideal prince designed to make clear to their flesh-and-blood counterparts the duties inherent in the royal office. Although drawing on the commonplaces of medieval European political literature and diverging hardly at all from conventional typologies of princely vice and virtue, the idea of kingship current in Scotland is an important indication, not only of the needs and expectations of the late medieval community, but also of the assumptions and preconceptions which governed its political thinking.

The overwhelming importance of princely power was well indicated by Fordun when he wrote that 'a country without a king [is] like a ship amid the waves of the sea, without rower or steersman'.<sup>1</sup> Bereft of its head (to use the more common contemporary analogy) the body-politic lacked its most essential constituent element. At the apex of the social and political hierarchy, the overlord of the feudal community to whom all owed fealty and allegiance, the king was the source and origin of all power, lands and jurisdiction. In contemporary phraseology he was, above all, the source of justice and on its equitable administration, it was believed, depended the internal stability of the realm. R. J. Lyall has pointed out the over-riding preoccupation with justice evident in the social and political criticism of fifteenth century Middle Scots poetry. Equally, he has stressed the typological as opposed to the topical nature of that criticism in works such as Robert Henryson's fables and the anonymous Thre Prestis of Peblis.<sup>2</sup> The need for justice - like the desire for freedom - was the constant, if more conventional, refrain of contemporary literature of all kinds. It is, for example, the main theme of a vernacular poem appended to the Book of Pluscarden and published separately in 1508 as Ane Buke of Gud Counsale to the King.<sup>3</sup> Justice, its anonymous author asserted, is the 'souerane flour of vertu' and on it depends the well-being and prosperity of the realm:

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1. Chron. Fordun, ii, 289.

2. R. J. Lyall, 'Politics and Poetry in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Scotland', Scottish Literary Journal, III (1976), 5-29. The subsequent argument owes a considerable debt to this revealing article.

3. Most accessibly printed in Chron. Pluscarden, i, 392-400.



Justice makis riche bathe revme [= realm] and ceteis,  
 Bath king and knaif, knyght, clergy and common,  
 Haldis pepil in pece and gude prosperiteis,  
 Salfis thair saulis, makis thair saluacion;  
 Quhair lak of law bringis al this vpsadon [= up-side-  
 And makis al pure, princis and potestatis; down],  
 Than God and man al this warld thaim hatis.<sup>1</sup>

It is recommended, therefore, that the king establish an auditor of complaints 'Quhilk daily suld minister judgment / To pure folk that cryis "Justice!" at thi dure', that judges be carefully chosen to avoid corruption and partiality and that their judgments be strictly enforced.<sup>2</sup> The same themes are picked up in the disquisition on kingship which finds its way even into Lancelot of the Laik. There the king is advised to appoint discreet and learned judges, personally to travel the realm to dispense his justice and to do so impartially to rich and poor alike.<sup>3</sup> To punish vice and nourish virtue was the first object of justice and the primary duty of the king. It was the means by which harmony was first established and then maintained in the body-politic. In its absence, discord and civil strife were a constant and menacing threat. Not surprisingly, at a time when successful government was heavily dependent upon the monarch's personal initiative, the need for the king's justice was perceived to be of paramount importance and reiterated time and again in contemporary

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1. Ibid., i, 396.

2. Ibid., i, 395-400.

3. Lancelot of the Laik, ll. 1600-56.

literature.<sup>1</sup>

But if it was imperative for the well-being of the realm that the king ensure the equitable administration of justice, it was equally important that he be well advised. Second only to justice among the preoccupations of fifteenth century commentators, therefore, was the need for wise counsel. 'Nothing in government is more fitting for a king than to have good counsellors', wrote Walter Bower, '... in good counsellors consists to the highest extent the honour, welfare and advantage of the king and the realm'. Consequently, he went on to advise that counsellors who were 'ambitious and avaricious' or 'crafty and deceitful' should be removed from the king's presence and replaced by honest men who would not 'sell justice for money' and who would 'blush at lies and flattery'.<sup>2</sup> Counsellors should be wise and incorruptible - qualities, it was believed, which were much more common in mature old age. Certainly the dangers to a king who 'luifit ouer weil gong counsel' were dwelt upon by the author of The Thre Prestis of Peblis:

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1. Although not different in kind from the western European norm, the relative lack of sophisticated legal and administrative institutions in fifteenth century Scotland meant that Scottish government was even more heavily dependent upon the person of the prince himself than that of most other contemporary kingdoms. In a sense, therefore, the ideal of kingship adumbrated here - itself of European currency - was of particular significance in a Scottish context. For a fine analysis of the practice of government which emphasizes the importance of the king's personality to its success, see Jennifer M. Brown (now Wormald), 'The Exercise of Power' in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London, 1977), 33-65.
  2. Chron. Bower, ii, 85-6; cf. Chron. Pluscarden, ii, 58-61.

Zong men he luifit to be him neist;  
Zong men to him thay war baith Clark and Preist,  
Hee luifit nane was ald or ful of age,  
 Sa did he nane of sad counsel nor sage.  
 To sport and play, quhyle vp and quhylum down, -  
 To al lichtnes ay was he redie bouin.<sup>1</sup>

Levity was not a quality thought at all appropriate in kings and those who encouraged it with wicked words and example were unceasingly condemned. Flattery in particular was a conventional and oft-repeated threat to the sombre virtues looked for in a king. Bower advised that kings should flee from a flatterer 'as from a scorpion', while the author of Lancelot of the Laik condemned the flatterer as worse than the plague 'and more the realme anoyith, / For he the law and puple boith distroyith'.<sup>2</sup> Flattery, sycophantic courtiers, evil counsellors - all were stereotypical diagnoses of the corruption of royal virtue in the middle ages. As we shall see, they remained highly significant explanations for the breakdown of kingship in sixteenth century Scotland.

The commonplace nature of these complaints and their fixation on the problem of royal virtue testifies to the overwhelming importance of the personality and moral proclivities of individual princes in the political universe of those authors whose works we are discussing. A corrupt king, it was universally assumed, inevitably resulted in a corrupt realm. The prince not only set the example for his court but was emulated by all his subjects. 'A prince', asserted Fordun, 'is doubly a wrong-doer if he strays from the path of virtue. For,

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1. The Thre Prestis of Peblis, ed. T. D. Robb (S.T.S., 1920), 11. 456-62.

2. Chron. Bower, ii, 56; Lancelot of the Laik, 11. 1928-30.



first, he entangles himself in vice and, next, he affords the humbler classes an example of wrong-doing. For "the fickle rabble changes with the chief".<sup>1</sup> Personalities, not institutions, were the subject-matter of most political discussion, and that discussion was conducted not in legal but in ethical language. Poets, chroniclers and political theorists reiterated ad nauseam and with little variation the virtues deemed essential to a king and the vices which he must at all costs eschew. Andrew Wyntoun, for example, provides a typically uninspiring appraisal of good King David I:

He was the beylde of his kyn;  
 Withe uertu he supprissit syn;  
 He chastit tha that war wiciouse,  
 And relewit al wertuousse.  
 His lif was furme of al meknes;  
 Mercoure he was of richtwysnes;  
 Exempil he was of chastite;  
 Mar luffit a man was nane than he.<sup>2</sup>

Slightly more interesting, if only because it eventually found its way into Shakespeare's Macbeth, is Fordun's description of how Malcolm dissembled villainy in order to test the loyalty of Macduff. Malcolm tells Macduff that he is afflicted with three 'monstrous besetting sins' - lust, avarice and unfaithfulness - which vices incapacitate him as a candidate for the Scottish throne. Macduff can only agree, merely adding that 'when such faults are hidden in the depths of the heart, treachery is, without fail, found lurking therein in their

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1. Chron. Fordun, ii, 188; the quotation from the classical poet Claudian was, as we shall see, frequently cited in sixteenth century discussions of a monarch's exemplary role.

2. Chron. Wyntoun, Bk.VIII, ll. 828-34; see also Bk.VII, ll. 3573-98, for a similarly conventional description of Alexander III's regal virtues.

company'.<sup>1</sup> Of course, aided by his godly wife St. Margaret, Malcolm later turned out to possess all those theological and cardinal virtues generally seen as the essence of good kingship, such virtues as underlie the advice to a prince in, for example, Bower's Scotichronicon and its derivative, the Book of Pluscarden.<sup>2</sup> The moral propensities of the prince - his manners and even his mannerisms - were perceived as crucial to the correct functioning of the polity. As a result they were adumbrated and analysed at great length and in minute detail.

The main source of the broad typology of princely vice and virtue and the locus classicus of this general mode of thought was the genre of specula principum, mirrors of princes, which had already by the late middle ages a long and respectable ancestry in European political thinking.<sup>3</sup> Designed as hand-books of governance for the education and guidance of princes, these works invariably contain an idealized portrait of the manners and conduct of a virtuous prince. One of the most popular examples of the genre was the Secreta Secretorum, attributed in the middle ages to Aristotle and believed to be a letter of advice from that sage philosopher to his pupil, Alexander the Great. About 1456 Gilbert Haye translated a French

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1. Chron. Fordun, ii, 184-91; Macbeth, Act IV, Scene 3. The latter is interesting testimony to the longevity of this mode of thought.
  2. Chron. Bower, ii, 85-9; Chron. Pluscarden, ii, 60-5. The latter amplifies Bower's advice without altering its substance.
  3. The speculum genre originated in the classical world. For its subsequent history and ramifications, see L. K. Born's lengthy introduction to his edition of Erasmus, The Education of a Christian Prince (New York, 1936); Allan H. Gilbert, Machiavelli's 'Prince' and its Forerunners (Durham, N.C., 1938); and Dora M. Bell, L'Ideal Ethique de la Royaute en France au Moyen Age (Geneva and Paris, 1962).

version of the work into Scots under the title The Buke of the Governauce of Princis.<sup>1</sup> In Haye's version the same characteristics of good kingship which we have encountered elsewhere are once again brought to the fore. Justice is lauded as the highest virtue, 'the fourme and foundement that God the glorious has sett to governe all his creatouris', without which 'soverane vertu ... he [the king] is nocht king na prince, bot he is contrarious to kingis and princis'.<sup>2</sup> Likewise the importance of good counsel, 'for thy prouffit and the commoun prouffit of thy realme', is impressed upon the prince at length.<sup>3</sup> Above all, however, throughout the work the prince is warned to avoid excess, to eschew the debilitating effects of such vices as lust, avarice and lechery, and to conduct himself and the affairs of the realm with temperance, discretion and prudence.<sup>4</sup> In effect, drawing on a well-established combination of classical and Christian strands of thought, the cardinal virtues - justice, temperance, fortitude and wisdom - allied to their theological counterparts - faith, hope and charity - were invoked by Haye as the essence of kingly government. That he should have emphasized, as he did, the classical at the expense of the theological virtues was, perhaps, an augury of a future more receptive to humanistic influences. For, in increasingly secular guise, this form of sententious moralizing was to survive (indeed, to thrive) in Scotland, as it did elsewhere in Europe, well into the early modern period. Furthermore, the very

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1. Printed in Gilbert of the Haye's Prose Manuscript, ed. J. H. Stevenson (S.T.S., 1901-14), ii, 71-165.

2. Ibid., ii, 145-6.

3. Ibid., ii, 147-56.

4. Ibid., ii, 80-3 and passim.



ubiquity of this mode of discourse is testimony to the pervading influence which the concept of the ideal prince had on contemporary political thought. For the purposes of political debate it provided not only a common (and often barely articulated) cluster of assumptions about the nature and function of kingship, but also a touchstone and justification for a great deal of social and political criticism. Arguably, the concept of the ideal prince was the keystone around which the edifice of most medieval and much early modern political thought was constructed.

Undoubtedly, the wide currency of these ideas owed much to the universal acceptance in the medieval period of the values of the chivalric code as the rule by which the social elite should aspire to govern its secular life. In the majority of the late medieval specula, for example, it was taken for granted that the chivalric code was as applicable to the king as it was to the knight. The king, after all, was simply a knight writ large, performing on a wider stage those duties which knightly status and the ideals of chivalry imposed upon him.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in its militarism allied to paternalism, the chivalric code embraced both those aspects of kingship which we have discussed thus far. The prince, like the knight, was not only a warrior but also a source of patriarchal authority and justice. It is hardly surprising, then, to find Gilbert Haye addressing The Buke of the Gouvernaunce of Princes to lords as well

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1. For a discussion of this point to which I am greatly indebted, see Arthur B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry: Studies in the Decline and Transformation of Chivalric Idealism (Durham, N.C., 1960), 192-5.

as to kings,<sup>1</sup> or to find that he also translated an early fourteenth century French version of Ramon Lull's Le Libre del Ordre de Cauayleria as an essential adjunct to it.<sup>2</sup> As described by Haye, chivalric values are, in fact, interchangeable with those embodied in the concept of the ideal prince. Like the king, the knight is not simply a man of war but is charged to 'manetene, governe and defend the small people in all justice and equitee'.<sup>3</sup> Like the king, he is to shun the seven deadly sins and to adhere strictly to the corresponding number of theological and cardinal virtues.<sup>4</sup> Finally, once more like the king, he is exhorted to act only in the general interest of the realm, '... for gude rescoun gevis, that all princis, lordis, and knyghtis specially, suld be mare curious of the commoun prouffit, na of thair awin propre gudis ...'.<sup>5</sup> In essence, for Haye and his contemporaries the function of kingship differed not at all from that of knighthood. Both were conceived in terms of the idealistic world of the chivalric code and both were described in the ethical language made so familiar by the universal currency of chivalric aspirations.

The classic manifestation of chivalric values in a Scottish context is, of course, John Barbour's Bruce. For Barbour, Bruce was a paragon of knightly graces:

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1. See, for example, Haye's Prose MS, ii, 75, 89.

2. See The Buke of the Order of Knychthede, in *ibid.*, ii, 1-70.

3. *Ibid.*, ii, 15.

4. *Ibid.*, ii, 52ff.

5. *Ibid.*, ii, 65.



A lord so swet and debonar,  
 So curtass and of sa fair effer,  
 So blith als and so veill bowrdand  
 And in battale stith to stand.<sup>1</sup>

He combined valour with prudence, justice with compassion, was generous, courteous and devout. He was, in short, the ideal prince, 'For bettir governour than he / Micht in na cuntre fundyn be'.<sup>2</sup> He had, moreover, his exact counterparts in Sir James Douglas and to a lesser extent Sir Thomas Randolph. Douglas, for example, is described in the same manner as Bruce as being '... off full fayr effer, / Wyss, curtaiss, and deboner'.<sup>3</sup> He too is praised for his prudent combination of wit and valour, while his solicitous concern for the welfare of his lands and dependants - sure indication of good lordship - is also pointed out.<sup>4</sup> The only difference between Bruce and Douglas is, in fact, imposed by the structure of Barbour's narrative itself. For, whereas Bruce primarily symbolizes the righteous struggle for freedom against 'foule thryldome', Douglas represents the parallel theme of the work based on a similar juxtaposition of loyalty and treachery. As Barbour says of Douglas:

Bot our all thing he lufit lawte;  
 At treasoune growyt he so gretly,  
 That na tratour mycht be hym by,  
 That he mycht wit, na he suld be  
 Weill punyst of his cruelte.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Barbour, Bruce, Bk.VIII, ll. 381-4.
  2. Ibid., Bk.XX, ll. 279-80. On Bruce as an ideal king, see Ebin, 'John Barbour's Bruce', 222-4, and the references to Barbour's text there cited.
  3. Barbour, Bruce, Bk.I, ll. 361-2.
  4. Ibid., Bk.XVI, ll. 489-534, and Bk.V, ll. 225-54.
  5. Ibid., Bk.XX, ll. 516-20.



Randolph, although a lesser figure than Douglas, is imbued with the same values and Barbour's description of this worthy knight bears all the hall-marks of chivalric romance:

Laute he lofit atour all thing;  
 Falsade, trescune, and felony  
 He stude agane ay ythandly;  
 He hyet honor and largess,  
 And ay mantemyt richtwisnes;  
 In cumpany solacius  
 He wes, and thar-with amorus,  
 And gud knychtis he lufit ay.  
 For gif that I the suth sall say,  
 He wes fullfillit of all bwnte,<sup>1</sup>  
 And off all vertewis maid wes he.

Such a catalogue of chivalric virtues could easily be transferred to Douglas or to Bruce himself. Clearly, as with any chanson de geste, the 'lordingis' who read or heard recited Barbour's 'romanys' were entering on a course of instruction in chivalric values. The virtues and code of conduct displayed there - as, perhaps less palatably, in Haye's prose translations - were those to which the king and the aristocracy were expected to conform their private and public behaviour. It was within the ambience of chivalric idealism that the political values of the social elite were moulded and took shape. From it they drew not simply example and inspiration but also some understanding of the political world they inhabited and their own duties and obligations within it.

As we have seen, however, from Barbour they could draw something more. For if the Bruce is the finest example of the sustained application of chivalric values in a Scottish context, it is equally indicative of the strictures which that context imposed on their

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1. Ibid., Bk.X, ll. 289-95.

development and use. For in the Bruce, still more than in the Arthurian romances previously discussed, chivalric idealism is deliberately tempered by patriotic ideology.<sup>1</sup> For Barbour, as for the rest of the Scottish writers we have examined, the problem of the integrity of their kingdom necessarily took precedence over flights of chivalric fancy. Consequently, the rarefied atmosphere of continental chivalric romanticism was polluted in Scotland by strident political realism. Bruce, Douglas and Randolph assuredly remain knights but, far from being errant, they are firmly located - both topographically and ideologically - within a harsh and rugged Scottish landscape. In Barbour's Bruce, in other words, the code of chivalry is made to work for the cause of freedom. Like history and divine providence, it was harnessed and made subservient to a patriotic ideology which was both deep-rooted and pervasive. It was Barbour's considerable achievement to marry these elements together in a dramatic and evocative narrative which defies literary classification. More importantly, however, it was this same potent blend of chivalric and patriotic idealism which was to be the medieval period's most significant legacy to subsequent generations.

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1. For a similar argument made from a literary viewpoint, see A. M. Kinghorn, 'Scottish Historiography in the 14th Century: A New Introduction to Barbour's Bruce', Studies in Scottish Literature, VI (1969), 131-45.



## Chapter Two

### The Impact of Humanism

Widespread and pervasively influential as it was in the middle ages, the chivalric ethos described in the previous chapter inevitably had to face criticisms and challenges which gradually weakened its hold on the European mind.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, among the most far-reaching transformations in the political thought of early modern Europe was the redefinition of the function and attributes of the aristocracy (including kings) in terms, not of chivalry, but of citizenship. Beginning in the fifteenth century and gaining impetus throughout the sixteenth, the ideal of the knight in the service of Christendom was gradually displaced by that of the gentleman in the service of the commonwealth. The process was slow and piecemeal, but it nevertheless signified a dramatic reorientation of the secular values and aspirations of the aristocratic elite. In contrast, for example, to the chivalric romances previously discussed, Castiglione's Il Cortegiano (1528) and Elyot's The Boke Named The Governour (1531) perceive the nobleman, not as a warrior trained only in the law of arms, but as a citizen or gentleman educated also to serve at court and in government. Such an ideal was patently humanist in

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1. For the general background to the decline of chivalry and the types of criticism levelled against it, see Richard Barber, The Knight & Chivalry (London, 1970), Ch.22; Sidney Painter, French Chivalry : Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Medieval France (Baltimore, 1940), Chs.1 and 5; and especially Arthur B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry : Studies in the Decline and Transformation of Chivalric Idealism (Durham, N.C., 1960), Ch.6.



inspiration : a product of the renewed interest in classical antiquity and the absorption of the ethical and political ideas of pagan philosophers.<sup>1</sup> But humanism provided only the ideal, not the spur to its realization. The latter was the product of the nobility's own dawning recognition that the values of the chivalric code were no longer adequate as a guide to their public function and conduct.

The aristocratic elites of western Europe were nothing if not resilient and in the sixteenth century they were obliged to adjust their attitudes in order to meet challenges both from above and below. From above, the burgeoning authority of their royal masters exerted pressure on their ancient fiscal and jurisdictional independence which altered the balance of power firmly in favour of the former. Simultaneously, the concomitant expansion and professionalization of the royal armies and bureaucracies created a new class of skilled royal officials which threatened from below their traditional functions and positions in state. Squeezed thus by the crown and the noblesse de robe, the noblesse d'epée had to abandon their quasi-independent way of life in order to maintain control over the levers of patronage and power. They had, as it were, to meet the new nobility on their own ground, acquire the skills necessary for a more sophisticated form of government and become the servants of the crown and commonwealth. Through the 'new learning', the humanists sought to provide the educational framework - the training in rhetoric and the liberal arts - by means of which this might be accomplished and so enable the hereditary nobility to retain their places in the governments of the 'new

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1. On this process generally as it affected educational ideals, see R. R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries (Cambridge, 1954).

monarchies'. Consequently, by the mid-sixteenth century many of the aristocracy were being educated in the studia humanitatis, not only learning the military arts, but also acquiring the social refinements and intellectual accomplishments of gentlemen-governors. Thereafter the movement rapidly gathered momentum, signalling a revolution both in educational provision and in the outlook and aspirations of the ruling elites. In effect, the complex interaction of the 'new learning' and the 'new monarchies' had conspired to create a new role and a new system of values for the aristocracies of western Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Scotland, of course, is generally associated with neither the spread of the 'new learning' nor the emergence of the 'new monarchies'. For most Scottish historians, the caesura that marks the transition from the medieval to the early modern era is not the Renaissance - in either its cultural or its political manifestation - but the Reformation of c.1560.<sup>2</sup> The latter doubtless was a uniquely significant watershed in Scotland's history - and indeed in the history of Scottish political thought. But its centrality must not be allowed to obscure the important developments - other than the progressive decay of the Roman Church - of the century preceding 1560. Recent research,

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1. The seminal article in which the above thesis was stated is J. H. Hexter, 'The Education of the Aristocracy in the Renaissance', reprinted in his Reappraisals in History (London, 1961), 45-70. For more specific treatment of the same theme, see for example J. H. M. Salmon, Society in Crisis : France in the Sixteenth Century (London and Tonbridge, 1975), Ch.5, and Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641 (Oxford, 1965), esp. Ch.12.
  2. For a welcome exception to this general rule which seeks to place the Scottish Reformation in the context of a Scottish Renaissance, see Jenny Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community : Scotland 1470-1625 (London, 1981).



for example, has revealed the substantial impact of humanism on certain circles in Scotland during this period,<sup>1</sup> while despite (or because of) successive minorities there seems little doubt that Scottish monarchs were eager to extend their governmental competence at the expense of rival jurisdictions both at home and abroad.<sup>2</sup> It seems reasonable to posit, therefore, that as in other western monarchies experiencing similar conditions, the nature of Scottish political thought would undergo important, albeit gradual changes not necessarily related to the confessional strife of the era. More specifically, it seems pertinent to ask whether the Scottish political elite was not forced into a re-evaluation of the secular ideals by which it regulated its public life. In short, was the urge to transform the aristocracy from a body of chivalric knights into one of gentlemen-governors as apparent in Scotland as it was elsewhere in Europe? What follows in this chapter is essentially an attempt to answer this question in relation to the period before 1540. In so

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1. See in particular John Durkan, 'The Beginnings of Humanism in Scotland', Innes Review, IV (1953), 5-24, and the same author's 'The Cultural Background in Sixteenth Century Scotland', Innes Review, X (1959), 382-439. See also John MacQueen, 'Some Aspects of the Early Renaissance in Scotland', Forum for Modern Language Studies, III (1967), 201-22.
  2. This emerges only too clearly from the first in depth analysis of the policies and practices of a contemporary Scottish monarch: Norman Macdougall, James III : A Political Study (Edinburgh, 1982). As Dr. Macdougall concludes, although James III lost his life as well as his throne during the rebellion of 1488, he failed 'not because of his policies - many of which would rapidly be adopted by his popular son - but because of his personality' (p.308). There seems no reason to believe that Stewart monarchs in general were at all reluctant to extend their powers wherever and whenever possible. Their problem lay, with the possible exceptions of James IV and VI, in their apparent inability to do so without alienating substantial portions of the political community.



doing, it is hoped to reveal the ways in which the patterns of thought evident in the medieval period were modified and developed as they crossed the threshold of the sixteenth century.

## I

As a point of departure we can do no better than to examine contemporary attitudes to the key and related issues of the nature of nobility and of the education deemed suitable for a nobleman. For both of these, and particularly the latter, are revealing of the more general social and political role which the aristocracy was expected to fulfil. Moreover, in his translation of a basic chivalric text, Gilbert Haye provides a convenient benchmark against which changes in these attitudes can be measured. As regards the nature of nobility, for example, Haye claimed in his Buke of the Order of Knychthede that 'hye parage [= high parentage] and ancien honour ar the first poyntis of the rute of knychthede, that is cummyn fra alde ancestry'. In other words, in common with chivalric writers generally, he believed that nobility and honour - the prerequisites of knighthood - were determined by birth and heredity and that those of 'villaine lignage' could not therefore be seriously considered as knights.<sup>1</sup> There was, of course, a practical reason for this exclusiveness in that the landed wealth essential to the knight's material support was largely the preserve of those of aristocratic birth.<sup>2</sup> But equally there was a strong tendency to associate the seven cardinal and theological

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1. Gilbert of the Haye's Prose Manuscript, ed. J. H. Stevenson (S.T.S., 1901-14), ii, 37.

2. *Ibid.*, ii, 39-40.

virtues directly and exclusively with those of 'hye parage'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, even if in the ideal world of the chivalric code a nobleman was by definition noble, he had still to learn the martial and other skills befitting his status. Heye recommended, therefore, that kings should establish 'sculis of chevalrye' where 'the poyntis and proprieteis of noblesse' could be thoroughly inculcated.<sup>2</sup> Such a scheme of state support was palpably impractical, but Heye also portrayed the more conventional training of an aspirant knight in the household of a great lord. There he would learn 'to kerve before him, to serve in chaumer, till arme a lord, till ouersee his hors, ... to haunt armouris, to ryn a spere, to exercise wapnis, and other habiliteis of honour quhilk appertenis to nobless'.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Heye provided a brief outline of the way of life to which this education would eventually lead:

Knychtis suld be wele ryddin, and in zouthede lere [= learn] to be wele ryddin on destrellis and courseris, till haunte justis and tournaymentis, to hald table round, to hunt and hawk at hert and hynde, daa and raa, bere and baare, loup and lycoun, and all sik honourable plesauncis, and sa mayntenand the office and the ordre of knycthede worthily.<sup>4</sup>

Such in brief was the life-style of the warrior aristocracy of Europe throughout much of the middle ages. By the later fifteenth century, however, it was fast becoming anachronistic and in the following hundred years it was subject to a crescendo of damaging criticism.

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1. Ibid., ii, 38.

2. Ibid., ii, 17-8.

3. Ibid., ii, 16.

4. Ibid., ii, 23.



Much of this criticism emanated from humanists who disliked unlettered and allegedly boorish noblemen who had no time for learning but frittered away their days - as Haye had recommended - hawking, hunting and jousting. Thomas Elyot, for example, lamented their pride and arrogance and blamed their parents for neglecting to educate them properly.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Erasmus believed that, lacking a suitable education, the nobility had become 'soft from indolence, effeminate through sensual pleasures, with no knowledge of any useful vocation'.<sup>2</sup> These were to become well-worn themes of humanist criticism in the sixteenth century, but behind them lay a much more fundamental critique of the nature of nobility itself.<sup>3</sup> The humanists doubted, for example, whether 'true nobility' (vera nobilitas) could be as readily identified with birth and lineage as writers such as Haye implied. Instead, at least in theory, they preferred to see virtue alone, irrespective of social status, as the essence of true nobility. This was by no means a novel idea, but it was one which figured more and more frequently in humanist discussions of the prerequisites of nobility. Having said that, however, humanists seem

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1. Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named The Governour, ed. H. H. S. Croft (London, 1883), i, 98ff.
  2. Erasmus, The Education of a Christian Prince, ed. L. K. Born (New York, 1936), 226-7. For further examples of this kind of criticism, see Hexter, 'Education of the Aristocracy', 46-7.
  3. For more wide-ranging discussions of what follows, see Charity C. Willard, 'The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court', Studies in the Renaissance, XIV (1967), 33-48; Sydney Anglo, 'The Courtier : The Renaissance and Changing Ideals', in The Courts of Europe : Politics, Patronage and Royalty 1400-1800, ed. A. G. Dickens (London, 1977), 33-53; and Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge, 1978), i, 228-43.



generally to have been no more willing than their predecessors wholly to divorce merit from lineage. Consequently, they were inclined to conclude that, although virtue was indeed the essence of nobility, it was nevertheless a commodity most commonly to be found in men of ancient birth. In the last analysis, therefore, the humanists did not in fact depart far from Hays's punning contention that nobility was the preserve of the nobility. What they did do, however, was radically to reinterpret the nature of the virtue which a nobleman was obliged to possess. Moreover, in so doing, they radically reorientated the educational programme essential for its cultivation. For although still adhering to the broad categories provided by the cardinal virtues of pagan philosophy, these were now harnessed, not to the promotion of an aggressive martial spirit nor to the pleasures of courtly love, but to the cultivation of the mind and the creation of the perfect governor. Consequently, the young nobleman would now be sent neither to 'sculis of chevalrie' nor to carve in the household of a great lord. On the contrary, he would be educated in the studia humanitatis and learn the art of government from classical texts of rhetoric and moral philosophy.

One prominent Scotsman who echoed this humanist critique of 'true nobility' was the redoubtable John Mair. Mair (1467/8-1550), however, was not a humanist in the conventional sense of that term: he was a scholastic theologian of keen (if idiosyncratic) intellect who deliberately eschewed the 'elegant and highly-coloured language' beloved of the humanists because he believed that it subordinated

correct understanding to 'a curious research of language'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as his defence of his own method testifies, Mair was well aware of contemporary rhetorical fashions and possessed a mind sufficiently broad to see the force of much humanist social criticism. In his History of Greater Britain (1521), for example, he teased his countrymen for their inordinate pride in nobility of birth and proceeded to argue that:

There is absolutely no true nobility but virtue and the evidence of virtue. That which is commonly called nobility is naught but a windy thing of human devising.<sup>2</sup>

He broached the same theme in the same terms in his commentary on the fourth book of Peter Lombard's Sentences.<sup>3</sup> There he argued that there are two kinds of nobility: one of the soul which 'alone is, rightly speaking, nobility', and that which derives from birth or, as Aristotle put it, from 'ancient wealth'. Touching the latter category, Mair did not deny that 'by instinct, by nature, good sons are born of good parents' and that awareness of noble ancestry might be a spur to virtue, but he was quick to add that, being endowed with free will, a nobleman might equally become vicious. In the last analysis, he argued, 'it is virtue of the soul alone which ennobles a man' and he therefore advised parents 'to stir up their children, while these are young, to right conduct, and then will these children excel their parents even in virtue'. Education was

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1. John Mair, A History of Greater Britain ... 1521, ed. and trans. Archibald Constable (S.H.S., 1892), cxxxv.

2. Ibid., 46.

3. The relevant part of this is reprinted in *ibid.*, 397-400.



thus of crucial importance and, in the History, Mair made clear that he was not simply concerned with training in the martial arts. There he complained that the nobility 'educate their children neither in letters nor in morals' and asserted that:

They ought to search out men learned in history, upright in character, and to them entrust the education of their children, so that even in tender age they may begin to form right habits, and act when they are mature in years like men endowed with reason.

Furthermore, he assured the nobility, such learning would enhance rather than diminish the bravery of their children, 'as may be seen from the example of the Romans, whose most illustrious generals were men well skilled in polite learning; and the same thing we read of the Greeks, the Carthaginians, and the Persians'.<sup>1</sup>

Few humanists would have disagreed with Mair's analysis, but fewer still would have relished the theologian's scholastic mode of reasoning. According to Mair himself, one such critic (more friendly than most) was the Scots poet and ecclesiastic, Gavin Douglas (c.1475-1522). The two were well acquainted, Mair dedicating his commentary on the fourth book of the Sentences (1516) to Douglas in his capacity as Bishop of Dunkeld.<sup>2</sup> More interestingly, however, he also included in his commentary on the first book (1510) a dialogue between the poet and his own favourite pupil, David Cranston.<sup>3</sup> Here Douglas is portrayed as a critic of obfuscatory scholastic methods and as a disciple of the humanist rhetorical school. Whether

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1. Ibid., 48.

2. Ibid., 437.

3. Ibid., 425-8.



the dialogue is factually based or not, a prima facie case can be made for Douglas' humanist sympathies. The translator of Virgil's Aeneid, a friend of the Italian historian of England Polydore Vergil and an admirer of Lorenzo Valla, his latest critic has in fact concluded that humanist ideas 'were not only available to Douglas but congenial to him'.<sup>1</sup> This alone would add interest not just to the Eneados but more pertinently to Douglas' other extant work, The Palice of Honour. Still further interest is added when it is recalled that Douglas was both a leading politician and the third son of the 5th earl of Angus, Archibald 'Bell-the-Cat'. He was, therefore, a member (for a time the leading member) of one of Scotland's most powerful noble houses.<sup>2</sup> His attitude to the concept of honour, closely (often indistinguishably) allied to that of nobility,<sup>3</sup> is consequently of the greatest interest.

We can say at once, however, that the values Douglas celebrated in his poetry are those of the traditional aristocratic world in which he was brought up. Neither in form nor content, for example, does The Palice of Honour show significant signs of humanist influence. An allegorical dream poem, it displays all the rhetorical devices and conventions employed in its medieval predecessors. To

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1. Priscilla Bawcutt, Gavin Douglas : A Critical Study (Edinburgh, 1976), 30.
  2. For a brief biographical sketch, see *ibid.*, 1-22.
  3. For a discussion of the close relationship between virtue, honour and nobility, see C. B. Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour (Princeton, 1960), esp. Chs.1-2. See also Mervyn James, 'English Politics and the Concept of Honour', Past and Present, Supplement 3 (1978), 2-22.

be sure, Douglas points out that honour, like nobility, is founded on virtue rather than birth or worldly wealth. His guide through the palace, for example, declares that honour:

Differris richt far fra warldlie gouerning,  
 Quhilk is bot Pompe of eirdlie dignitie,  
 Geuin for estait of blude, nicht or sic thing.  
 And in this countrie Prince, Prelate or King  
 Allanerlie sall for vertew honourit be.<sup>1</sup>

But the virtue which assures access to the palace of honour is defined, not in terms of the categories employed by the humanists, but in terms of the heroic world of the chivalric code. The poet's guide describes the palace's inhabitants in language far removed from that of humanist social criticism:

'Yone war,' quod scho, 'quha sa the richt discriues,  
 Maist vailzeand folk and verteous in thair liues.  
 Now in the Court of Honour thay remane  
 Verteouslie, and in all plesance thrives.  
 For thay with speir, with swords and with kniues  
 In iust battell war fundin maist of mane,  
 In thair promittis thay stude euir firme and plane,  
 In thame aboundit worschip and lawtie,  
 Illuminat with liberalitie.'<sup>2</sup>

The values of 'worschip', 'lawtie' and 'liberalitie' praised here are reminiscent more of John Barbour and chivalric romance than of John Mair or the liberal arts. Douglas, indeed, gives short shrift to 'Sapience' as a means of attaining honour and, while the Muses fare rather better, poetry and history (with which the poet himself

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1. The Palice of Honour, ll. 1973-7, in The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt (S.T.S., 1967). (All references to this poem are to the Edinburgh version.)

2. *Ibid.*, ll. 1963-71.



identifies) are a means, not to honour itself, but of immortalizing the heroic deeds of chivalric warriors.<sup>1</sup> The traditional ambience of the poem is still further emphasized by Douglas' elaborate description of Honour's palace itself. Here the poet employs a conventional personification of the virtues in an allegorical representation of a royal household: Honour's secretary, for example, is constancy, his treasurer liberality, his chancellor conscience, his comptroller discretion, and so on until every royal office is filled by some variant of the cardinal and theological virtues.<sup>2</sup> However 'available' and 'congenial' humanism may have been to Douglas, it apparently did little to alter his thoroughly traditional conception of virtue and honour.

Although The Palice of Honour is an early work, completed in 1501 when Douglas was in his mid-twenties, there is no evidence to suggest that when, some twelve years later, he finished his translation of the Aeneid he had made the conceptual shift in the interpretation of virtue evident among the humanists. Admittedly, the work is encouragingly dedicated to Henry, Lord Sinclair, whom the poet praises not just as 'a lord of renown, / Of ancistry nobill and illustir baroun', but as a 'Fader of bukis, protectour to sciens and lair [= learning]'.<sup>3</sup> But these initial comments are soon overshadowed by what we must take as Douglas' real purpose in translating the

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1. Ibid., ll. 193-300, 772-1242.

2. Ibid., ll. 1792-1827.

3. Virgil's Aeneid translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas, ed. D. F. C. Coldwell (S.T.S., 1957-64), Bk.I (Prologue), ll. 79-86.





Aeneid. The poet is addressing a noble audience and Aeneas is to be looked upon as an exemplar of chivalric virtue. In him, Douglas tells us, is displayed:

All wirschip, manhed and nobilite,  
With euery bonte belangand a gentill wucht  
Ane prynce, ane conquerour or a valzeand knyght.<sup>1</sup>

The poet is employing a 'knychtyke stile' to describe deeds of 'prowess and hie chevelry' in the hope that his auditors will be inspired to emulate his valorous conduct.<sup>2</sup> In short, as in his earlier work, Douglas is intent, not on altering the inherited values of his aristocratic audience, but on reminding them of the supreme importance of such virtues as manhood and loyalty, fortitude and faith.<sup>3</sup>

The Palice of Honour was dedicated to James IV and the Eneados completed only months before that monarch was killed at the battle of Flodden in September 1513. Both works were well suited to a king whose desire for knightly renown was obsessive and who lost his life in its pursuit. James, moreover, set the tone for his court and Douglas' poems will have found a ready audience among those who relished the jousts and tournaments, hunting and hawking, minstrelsy and pageantry with which king and courtiers beguiled the hours.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., Bk.I (Prologue), ll. 330-2.

2. Ibid., Bk.IX (Prologue), ll. 31, 90.

3. Ibid., Bk.XI (Prologue), ll. 1-200.

4. For an impressionistic account of court life under James IV, see R. L. Mackie, King James IV of Scotland : A Brief Survey of His Life and Times (Edinburgh and London, 1958), 118-27; cf. Ranald Nicholson, Scotland : The Later Middle Ages (Edinburgh, 1974), 574-6.

Undoubtedly, Douglas is much more representative of the public culture of early sixteenth century Scotland than the idiosyncratic John Mair. A useful illustration of this is provided by the products of the printing-press which had a short-lived existence in Scotland between 1508 and 1510. Established to print specifically Scottish material - 'bukis of our Lawis, actis of parliament, croniclis, mess bukis, and portuus efter the use of our Realme'<sup>1</sup> - Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar saw better commercial prospects in work of a quite different nature. In 1508, for example, they are known to have printed twelve works.<sup>2</sup> Almost half of these were contemporary or near contemporary poems, one by Robert Henryson and four by William Dunbar. A further three, a quarter of the total, were chivalric romances, one of these being the tale of Golagros and Gawaine already discussed. Two more consist of Blind Hary's Wallace (perhaps the printers' astute nod in the direction of the chronicles) and the Buke of Gud Counsale to the King, a verse piece on kingship which we have again already encountered. There is nothing here to suggest a dramatic re-orientation of public taste. Nor does one further publication, the Porteous of Noblenes, go far to question the overwhelming domination of the chivalric ethos during this period. The Porteous of Noblenes (a translation of Alain Chartier's Breviare de Noblesse), although it purports to be an analysis of the roots of 'verray nobilite', turns out on closer inspection to be little more than a brief catalogue of the qualities believed to constitute chivalric

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1. See R. Dickson and J. P. Edmond, Annals of Scottish Printing (Cambridge, 1890), 7-8.

2. H. G. Aldis, A List of Books Printed in Scotland before 1700 (revd. edtn., Edinburgh, 1970), nos. 3-14.



virtue. These, numbering twelve in all, range from faith, loyalty and honour through love, courtesy and cleanliness to largesse, sobriety and perseverance.<sup>1</sup> The work is, therefore, neither original nor particularly remarkable. What is important is that Gavin Douglas, while perhaps disagreeing with some of its details, was quite clearly speaking the same chivalric language.

But if the chivalric code continued to dominate political thinking in this way, we must nevertheless beware of writing off humanism as of minimal influence in Scotland. After all, the Scottish literati were at home on the continent and, if their native printing-press was singularly unadventurous, they had easy access to more daring ones in France and the Low Countries. Many of them undoubtedly took advantage of this and Scottish libraries were far from bereft of works of humanist scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, for all his chivalric bluster, James IV could still employ Erasmus as tutor to his illegitimate son, Alexander Stewart, the youthful archbishop of St. Andrews - a connection which to Erasmus' chagrin was broken by the archbishop's untimely death at Flodden but which had previously taken the pair of them as far afield as Padua.<sup>3</sup> Nor should we forget that the royal secretariat was increasingly staffed by men skilled in fashionable rhetorical techniques and that, as early as the 1480's, both Archibald Whitelaw and William Elphinstone were quite capable of delivering

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1. A Scots translation of the work is printed in The Asloan Manuscript, ed. W. A. Craigie (S.T.S., 1923-5), i, 171-84.
  2. See Durkan, 'Cultural Background', 274-8; and John Durkan and Anthony Ross, Early Scottish Libraries (Glasgow, 1961).
  3. Durkan, 'Beginnings of Humanism', 6-7.



polished Ciceronian orations as part of their customary ambassadorial duties.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the educational reforms attributed to Bishop Elphinstone also require notice, for as an attempt to create an educated laity trained both in arts and law, they mark a significant change in traditional attitudes to lay education.

The so-called 'Education Act' of 1496, for example, laid down that barons and freeholders should place their eldest sons and heirs in grammar schools until 'thai be competentlie foundit and have perfite latyne' and thereafter should send them for three years to 'the sculis of art and jure sua that thai may have knowlege and understanding of the lawis'.<sup>2</sup> Its purpose, as the act went on to explain, was to relieve the pressure on the over-burdened central courts, transferring much of the business back to the localities where landowners, trained in the law, could administer justice efficiently and effectively. Elphinstone may well have been responsible for this far-sighted measure, just as he probably initiated the aforementioned printing-press designed to publish, among other things, law books and acts of parliament. To a remarkable degree, the bishop of Aberdeen seems to have been aware of the need for an educated laity trained, not only for war, but to assume administrative responsibilities hitherto the preserve of despised clerics. Certainly, when in 1494

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1. MacQueen, 'Aspects of the Renaissance', 206-8. Whitelaw's oration is printed in The Bannatyne Miscellany (Bannatyne Club, 1827-55), ii, 41-8; of Elphinstone's we have only a second-hand account in Hectoris Boetii Murthlacensium et Aberdonensium Episcoporum Vitae, ed. and trans. James Moir (New Spalding Club, 1894), 66-73.

2. Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, ed. T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814-75), ii, 238.

he drew up his plans for the new University of Aberdeen, he made deliberate provision for the education of laymen both in arts and law.<sup>1</sup> There is, moreover, some evidence that the bishop was not totally ignored (or was, in part, preaching to the converted) for laymen are found in small but increasing numbers at Scottish universities at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it seems clear that from that time onwards lay lawyers played an increasingly significant role in central government and administration and that this trend gained in strength during the subsequent half century.<sup>3</sup> In fact, these changes represent the product of what has been called a 'silent revolution in literacy' which began around the middle of the fifteenth century and which continued throughout the sixteenth.<sup>4</sup> During this period an increasing number of laymen found it necessary or expedient to acquire literary skills which their forbears had never possessed but which were now becoming essential prerequisites of a successful career in government. Elphinstone did not initiate this

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1. On this point, see Leslie J. MacFarlane, 'William Elphinstone, Founder of the University of Aberdeen', Aberdeen University Review, XXXIX (1961), 1-18, esp. 11, 15-6.
  2. See Ian B. Cowan, 'Church and Society', in Scottish Society in Fifteenth Century, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London, 1977), 112-35, at 126.
  3. A. L. Brown, 'The Scottish "Establishment" in the Later 15th Century', Juridical Review, new series XXIII (1978), 89-105, at 103-4. As Brown points out, however, 'an analysis and a set of biographies are badly needed' before the full extent of lay infiltration can be adequately assessed.
  4. See Grant G. Simpson, Scottish Handwriting 1150-1650 : An Introduction to the Reading of Documents (Edinburgh, 1973), 10-14. The speed and the extent of the growth in lay literacy has never been quantified, but for some useful comments on its possible implications, see Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community, 68-71.



revolution, but he did much to encourage it. It does not seem wholly fanciful to suggest, therefore, that under his guidance the first faltering steps had been taken towards the creation of a body of gentlemen-governors in early modern Scotland.

In the light of this, it is fascinating - albeit futile - to speculate on what might have occurred in Scotland had not James IV died prematurely at Flodden and Elphinstone, ripe in years, shortly thereafter. Would the combination of a forceful but popular king and the leavening influence of court humanism have gradually altered the attitudes and outlook of the aristocratic elite? Would strong government and successful educational reforms have established the gentleman-governor as paradigmatic of an alternative and appealing noble lifestyle? Such questions do not, of course, admit of historical answers. As it was, James IV's untimely death and the succession of his year-old son James V initiated fifteen years of baronial conflict and a series of palace revolutions. Power devolved upon the ambitious magnate interests and the disputes and rivalry between them gave full rein to the seamier aspects of the aristocratic culture legitimated by the chivalric code. Lineage and honour, birth and nobility, were proved and protected by violence : Hamiltons and Douglasses - they, their kin and clients - contested and sought to vindicate their right to power with the sword.<sup>1</sup> As David Lindsay later commented:

That tyme in court, rais gret debait  
And euerilk lord did stryue for stait,

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1. For a survey of the events of the minority, see Gordon Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII (repr. Edinburgh, 1971), Ch.3.



That all the realme mycht mak no reddyng,  
 Quhill on ilk syde thare was blude scheddyng.<sup>1</sup>

In an atmosphere of aristocratic feud and violence there was small chance of a radical change in a value system geared to the display of martial prowess. Admittedly, away from the centre of power, in particular at the University of Aberdeen, the new learning continued to gain ground.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly also, there is no reason to think that the growth of literacy was significantly retarded by the circumstances of a royal minority. Nevertheless, lacking crown patronage, humanist influences inevitably remained fragmented and undynamic and, for the moment at least, their challenge to the traditional life-style of the Scottish political elite was dissipated and neutralized.

## II

In fact, even at Aberdeen where humanism undoubtedly had taken root, it is questionable how far the new learning had led to a marked change in political attitudes even in academic circles. This is perhaps best illustrated by the Scotorum Historiae (1527) of Hector Boece. Boece (1465-1536) was Elphinstone's choice as first principal of Aberdeen University and his History was the earliest full-length narrative account of Scotland's past. His Latinity is ample testimony to Boece's reverence for classical scholarship - he was besides the

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1. The Complaynt of Schir David Lindesay, ll. 351-4, in The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, ed. Douglas Hamer (S.T.S., 1931-6), i, 40-53.

2. On humanism at Aberdeen during this period, see John Durkan, 'Early Humanism and King's College', Aberdeen University Review, XLVIII (1980), 259-79.

friend and correspondent of Erasmus<sup>1</sup> - but he quite failed to see beyond the stylistic trappings of humanism to the new critical tools being pioneered by the philologists or even to the deepening scepticism which formed the basis of the best humanist historical criticism. He refined the style but not the content of the medieval sources on which most of the History is based. Consequently, like its predecessors, it is essentially a celebration of the martial prowess of the Scots in their courageous endeavour to preserve their country's independence. Although conscious of the domestic instability caused by his countrymen's disposition to violence, Boece was intent, not on altering the chivalric code which legitimated it, but on redirecting it into patriotic channels.<sup>2</sup> If anything, this intention was reinforced when John Bellenden translated the work into Scots in the early 1530's. Bellenden also translated the first five books of Livy's Ab Urbe Condita, a work which he believed was unsurpassed as a source from which 'to lere the arte of chevelrie' because 'Sa knichtly dedis in Bukis historiall / Sall neuer be fundin quhil the world Induris'.<sup>3</sup> He clearly saw Boece's History as a domestic variation on the same chivalric theme. In the 'Proheme of the History', for example, he addressed the work as 'Thow Marciall Buke' and, after a brief and conventional discussion of the nature of true nobility, concluded that:

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1. See *ibid.*, 260f. For fuller biographical details, see W. Douglas Simpson, 'Hector Boece', in Quartercentenary of the Death of Hector Boece (Aberdeen, 1937), 7-29.
  2. Boece's History is discussed in detail below, chapter 3.
  3. Livy's History of Rome, the First Five Books translated into Scots by John Bellenden 1533, ed. W. A. Craigie (S.T.S., 1901-3), i, 3.



Thairfore, he is maist nobill man,  
 Of all estatiss, under reverence,  
 That vaillyeantly doith close the latter day,  
 Of native cuntre, deand in defence.

He then went on to praise a combination of 'wit and manhede' as the true path to honour and glory in a manner reminiscent, not of the soldier-scholar of the Renaissance, but of Barbour's chivalric portraits of Robert Bruce and Sir James Douglas.<sup>1</sup> Such a comparison is not, indeed, inapposite for Boece's History and Barbour's Bruce were designed to serve an almost identical purpose.

Like Barbour, Boece and Bellenden were concerned that their contemporaries had declined from the virtuous behaviour of their heroic ancestors and that their present moral degradation threatened both the autonomy and internal stability of the realm. Like the Bruce, therefore, the History was intended as a mirror in which the current generation could view the exemplary conduct of their noble ancestors and be fired to emulation. We shall discuss the details of Boece's viewpoint in the following chapter; it is sufficient here to note that, in the circumstances of a lengthy and turbulent minority, it was a concern shared by many. One anonymous poet, for example, almost certainly writing in the 1520's, complained of the burnings, hangings and 'fals dissait' which characterized the rule of self-seeking and vain-glorious lords.<sup>2</sup> In similar vein, another argued that 'the caus sic truble sic debait / Sic rugrie reif ryngis in this

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1. The History and Chronicles of Scotland : written in Latin by Hector Boece ... and translated by John Bellenden ..., ed. Thomas Maitland (Edinburgh, 1821), i, civ-cviii.

2. See the poem 'Suppois I war in court most be', in The Bannatyne Manuscript, ed. W. Tod Ritchie (S.T.S., 1928-34), ii, 233-4.



regioun' was that the lords lacked both 'vertew and eruditoun' and were apt to equate virtue with voluptuousness.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, David Lindsay of the Mount (c.1490-1555) who gave most memorable voice to the corrupting influence of a long minority. In his Dreme of 1528, for example, he wrote of how 'Ihone the comoun weill' had been forced to flee from Scotland because:

Oure gentyll men ar all degenerat;  
 Liberalitie and Lawtie, boith, ar loste;  
 And Cowardyce with Lordis is laureate;  
 And knyghtlie curage turnit in brag and boste;  
 The ciuele weir misgydis euer[ilk] oist.  
 Thare is nocht ellis bot ilk man for hym self,  
 That garris me go, thus baneist lyke ane elf.<sup>2</sup>

Both for Lindsay and these other poets the traditional moral order had clearly collapsed : liberality, loyalty and courage - the mainstays of the chivalric code - had been transformed into avarice, deceit and cowardice, while self-interest had prevailed over concern for the common good. Noticeably, however, despite this breakdown of the old order, their perception of the function and attributes of the aristocracy remained substantially unchanged from what we encountered in the medieval period. The poets' critique of the nobility implied, not the replacement of the chivalric ethos by a new system of values, but its restoration to an ideal, pristine purity. Predictably enough, moreover, it was the return of a virtuous adult monarch which would initiate the regenerative process. According to Lindsay, for example, John the Commonweal resolved not to return to Scotland

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1. 'Be gracious ground and gate to sapience', in *ibid.*, ii, 221-4.

2. The Dreme of Schir David Lindesay, ll. 988-94 (Works, i, 3-38).

'tyll that I see the countre gydit / Be wysdome of ane gude auld prudent king'.<sup>1</sup> Unchallenged at the heart of Scottish political thinking still loomed the figure of the ideal prince and, as will become clear, kingship was still discussed in the ethical language popularized by the medieval specula.

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the several verse prologues which Bellenden added to his translation of Boece's History. In 'The Proheme of the Cosmographe', for example, he wrote of a dream in which he had seen a young prince tempted by 'two plesand ladyis', Delight and Virtue, the one urging him to forget the cares incumbent on his office and satisfy his lustful passions, the other exhorting him to repress the temptations of the flesh and labour for the common good.<sup>2</sup> The poet wakes up before the prince is allowed to make his choice, but Bellenden's meaning is quite plain. For him, as for Barbour, Fordun and others of his medieval predecessors, the well-being and stability of the realm depended on the prince's propensity for virtue or for vice. To Bellenden it was perhaps particularly important to make this point clear as his translation was commissioned specifically for the young James V. Certainly, he lost few opportunities to reiterate the theme. In the 'Epistil Direckit be the Translatoure, to the Kingis Grace', for example, he wrote that:

Erasmus Roterodamus, in his buke, namit the Institution of Cristin Kingis; schawis, maist nobil prince! na thing in mair admiration than werkis of kingis : quhilkis ar sa patent to the sight of pepill, that every man hes thaim in mouth, to thair commendation

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1. Ibid., ll. 1005-6.

2. Bellenden, History, i, v-xvi.



or repleif. Thus, may na thing be sa fruteful to dant the commoun errouris of pepill, as honest and virtewis life of kingis : for the life of kingis drawis thair subdittis to imitation of thair werkis, worthy or unworthy; ... Forthir, in every history thar men redis, apperis, evidently, the same maneris with the pepill, quhilkis ar usit be the king.<sup>1</sup>

Here the whole (and quite simple) rationale of the medieval speculum genre is succinctly set out : the people will always emulate the manners of the prince, therefore the prince must always ensure that he acts virtuously. Consequently, Bellenden went on to recommend that the king be well-versed in the History so that he might emulate his virtuous ancestors and set a worthy example for his subjects to imitate.<sup>2</sup>

Similar advice was proffered by David Lindsay who exhorted James V to read chronicles 'Quhilk may be a myrrour to thy Maieste' and also to study for half an hour each day 'The Regiment of princelie gouernyng'.<sup>3</sup> This last appears to be a reference to some specific example of the speculum genre and clearly both Lindsay and Bellenden thought in terms of the broad typology of royal virtue popularized by the specula. On one occasion, for example, Lindsay praised James V for displaying the 'foure gret verteous Cardinalis',<sup>4</sup> while in the Dreme he went on to specify in some detail the virtues of an ideal king:

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1. Ibid., ii, 513-4.

2. Ibid., ii, 515.

3. The Testament and Complaynt of our Souerane Lordis Papyngo, ll. 304-17 (Works, i, 56-90).

4. The Complaynt, l. 381.



Tak manlie curage, and leif thyne Insolence,  
 And use counsale of nobyll dame Prudence.  
 Founde the fermelie on Faith and fortitude:  
 Drawe to thy Courte Iustice and Temperance;  
 And to the commoun weill haue attendance.  
 And, also, I beseik thy Celsitude,  
 Hait vicious men, and lufe thame that are gude;  
 And ilke flattrer thow fleme [= banish] frome thy  
 presence,  
 And fals reporte out of thy courte exclude.<sup>1</sup>

The banality of this conventional description of the ideal prince is echoed (indeed, surpassed) by that of one Alexander Kidd. In his 'The riche fontane of hailfull sapience', probably written in the 1520's, he opined that:

All moral vertew ar neidful in to a king  
 ffortitude but [= without] prudens is verry tirrany  
 Prudens but iustice is reput for no thing  
 Iustice but temperance is bot crudelite  
 Temperans is not bot [= without] liberalitie  
 Amang all vertew Iustice is lawreat  
 And prince of Iustice The verry Image suld be  
 The quhilk but Vertew is blind and obsecat.<sup>2</sup>

Patently, the cardinal (and, to a lesser degree, the theological) virtues still provided the basic framework for discussing the attributes of an ideal king. Equally clearly, the person of the prince remained the pivot of a political consciousness moulded and channelled by traditional ethical preconceptions.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the main themes of social and political criticism also followed predictably conventional lines. The need for justice and good counsel and the evils of flattery and

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1. The Dreame, ll. 1064-72.

2. Bannatyne MS, ii, 243.

self-interest are reiterated time and again in contemporary literature.<sup>1</sup> The early work of David Lindsay is the prime example of this, his Dreme, Complaynt and the Testament of the Papyngo all being based on a highly traditional conception of good rulership. The Testament of the Papyngo is undoubtedly the most interesting of these, not least because Lindsay deliberately historicized his theme and illustrated it with reference to the fate of Scottish kings from Robert III to James V.<sup>2</sup> James III for example, was brought low by the evil counsel of 'Cochrame [sic], with his companye':

Thay grew, as did the weid abufe the corne,  
That prudent Lordis counsall wes refusit,  
And held hym quyet, as he had bene inclusit.  
Allace, that Prince, be thare abusoun,  
Was, fynalie, brocht to confusioun.

But the evil days of James III were followed by the glories of the reign of James IV. Then 'Iustice did preuaill':

And, of his court, throuch Europe sprang the fame  
Off lustie Lordis and lufesum Ladyis zing,  
Tryumphand tornayis, iustying, & knychtly game,  
With all pastyme accordyng for one kyng.

These glorious days, however, were brought to an abrupt end by the king's 'awin wyfull mysgouernance' at Flodden. Had James been 'counsalybl', lamented Lindsay, 'He had obtenit laude, glore, and victorie'. As it was, after his death, 'gret mysreule in to this regioun rang, / Quhen our zong prince could noder spek nor gang':

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1. For several examples of this, see R. J. Lyall, 'Politics and Poetry in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Scotland', Scottish Literary Journal, III (1976), 5-29, esp. 21-4.
  2. The Testament of the Papyngo, ll. 416-597, from where all the following quotations are drawn.



During his tender zouthe and innocence  
 Quhat stouith, quhat raif, quhat murthur, & myschance.  
 Thair wes not ellis bot wrakyng of vengeane,  
 In to that court thare rang sic variance.

When Lindsay wrote this appraisal of the previous half century of Scottish history,<sup>1</sup> James V had already entered his majority and was free of the flattering and factious domination of the Douglasses. Much still depended, however, on the character of the adult monarch : whether his personal virtues would lead to the assertion of justice and the stability of the realm or whether as yet unrevealed vices would perpetuate the misrule of an unstable minority. Both Bellenden and Lindsay were attempting to influence James in the former direction, but neither seemed certain of the outcome. What is, however, clear is that their expectations differed hardly at all from those of their fifteenth century predecessors.

Are we to conclude, then, that the impact of humanism on Scottish political thought in the early sixteenth century was negligible? That in the unpropitious circumstances of a lengthy minority the Scots clung tenaciously to familiar landmarks, to ideals of kingship and nobility rooted in the chivalric code and to an ideal

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1. It is incidentally an appraisal which made a signal contribution to the development of a body of myths regarding the fifteenth century - and particularly the reign of James III - which were incorporated in the sixteenth century chronicles and which are only now being subjected to serious criticism. Needless to say, these myths exemplify a highly conventional view of contemporary politics and are largely concerned with the corruption of the king by evil, upstart counsellors. For an analysis of the legends and the reasons for their growth, see Norman Macdougall, 'The Sources : A Reappraisal of the Legend', in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London, 1977), 10-32; see also the same author's James III, Ch.12.



political order whose systematic debasement they believed that they were currently witnessing? The evidence presented above indicates quite conclusively that this was, indeed, the case. The surface of Scottish public culture was left almost wholly undisturbed by any undercurrents of humanism and the general features of the community's political thinking remained substantially unaltered from the medieval period. In short, to answer the question with which this chapter began, at least before 1540 there was in Scotland no concerted effort to transform the outlook and aspirations of the aristocracy from the chivalric mould in which they had previously been set. John Mair apart, the Scots were singularly unresponsive to the humanists' critique of the chivalric ethos.

### III

Nevertheless, despite the continued dominance of Scottish political thought by values rooted in the chivalric code, there was one subtle but significant change in the terminology of public discourse which requires further investigation. That is, the gradual emergence of the term 'the commonweal' to a position of prominence in the political vocabulary of early sixteenth century Scotsmen.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps most noticeable in the poems of Sir David Lindsay. We have, for example, already encountered 'Ihone the comoun weill' in his writings as well as a plea to the king to display the royal

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1. As subsequent quotations will make clear sixteenth century spelling of the term varied enormously. For convenience sake, when not quoting directly, I have used the standard modern form : commonweal.

virtues and look to 'the commoun weill' of his realm and subjects. In the same vein, with reference to the discord of the 1520's, he accused the nobility of subordinating 'the commoun weill' to 'profit singulair', while on another occasion he warned of scheming counsellors who had no regard for 'commoun weill or kyngis'.<sup>1</sup> It is clear from these examples that Lindsay used the term quite literally to mean the public or universal good of the realm as opposed to the individual interests of its members. It had, therefore, particularly in the figure of John the Commonweal, social and political connotations inseparable from the exercise of good kingship. The commonweal, argued Lindsay, would be most efficaciously restored and maintained by a virtuous prince administering justice impartially to all his subjects. The word did not, therefore, signal any radical reorientation of the specifics of social and political criticism - these remained substantially unaltered from the previous century. What it did represent, however, was the emergence of a concept which, implying the welfare of the kingdom through the exercise of justice, could be used also as a succinct and evocative shorthand for a traditional ideal of kingship. As such, it was a potent accession to the limited medieval political vocabulary and one which was to figure largely in the public discourse of the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See The Dreame, ll. 909-10, and The Testament of the Papyngo, l. 382.

2. The term was probably a borrowing from England where it occurs with some frequency in fifteenth century political discourse. As will become clear, however, it developed distinctive connotations in Scottish usage. For interesting sidelights on its developing use in England and the key role it came to play there in the thinking of the 'Commonwealth Men', see Arthur B. Ferguson, The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance (Durham, N.C., 1965).



In fact, at the risk of anticipating future arguments, it is worth pausing at this stage to establish just how recently the term had come into general use in Scotland and to examine the range of meanings which it rapidly assumed. As regards the first point, it is interesting that among the generation of poets immediately preceding Lindsay it occurs only once in the writings of Gavin Douglas and only once in those of his contemporary William Dunbar.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as a study of the legislation of the Scottish parliament reveals, it is only after 1520 that the term occurs with any frequency. Before that date the stock formulae employed in parliamentary acts to denote the public welfare are such phrases as 'the common profit of the realm', 'the welfare and public good of the realm', 'the common good of our sovereign lord's realm and lieges', and 'the common profit and universal weal of the realm'.<sup>2</sup> Between 1460 and 1520, in fact, 'the commonweal of the realm' occurs only some five times as a convenient shorthand for such clumsy phraseology.<sup>3</sup> In the 1520's and 1530's, however, it is used on more than twenty separate occasions in a variety of types of legislation relating - apparently quite indiscriminately - to the economic, social and political welfare of

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1. Douglas, Aeneid, Bk.V (Prologue), l. 40; Dunbar, 'Devorit with Dreime, Devysing in my Slummer', l. 48, in The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. John Small (S.T.S., 1893), ii, 81-3.

2. Acts Parl. Scot., ii, 98, 165, 235. This is only a small sample of many such uses of this type of phraseology.

3. Ibid., ii, 143, 183, 214, 242-3, 282.



the kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in some of these instances the 'of the realm' is omitted and, standing alone, the 'commonweal' all but assumes a level of abstraction equivalent to the modern 'state'.<sup>2</sup> It would, of course, be quite wrong to think that Scottish legislators were groping consciously towards such an abstract formulation of the entity they served. For the most part, the term is quite clearly being used in the same sense as it was employed by Lindsay. Nevertheless, both the increased use of the phrase and the tendency to shorten it, were developments of the utmost importance in the evolution of a more sophisticated political vocabulary. Not only did the commonweal connote the social and political welfare of the realm, but it could also be used as a means of conceptualizing the community of interests whose welfare was at stake. In effect, the Scots had to hand a new term through which their sense of communal political identity could be clearly articulated.

In the light of this, it is perhaps hardly surprising that in the course of the sixteenth century the idea of the commonweal acquired markedly patriotic connotations. After all, such an accent

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1. E.g., *ibid.*, ii, 286, 289, 296, 298, 300, 303, 306, 314, 316, 319, 322, 338, 342, 346, 349, 351, 356, 373, 377, 379. The legislation ranges from an act nominating a secret council to act on James V's behalf during his minority for 'the commoun wele of his realme and liegis' (p.289), to an act against fire-raisers whose burning of the corn is 'sa gret offence aganis the commoun wele' (p.298); and from an act summoning the lieges to prepare for war against the Douglasses for 'the commoun wele and pacifying of the cuntre' (p.322), to an act anent breeding horses 'for the commoun wele of the Realme' (p.346).
  2. E.g., *ibid.*, ii, 289, 316, 373, 379. This usage is very ambiguous, but it was probably its very ambiguity which helped establish the term as such an important one in the contemporary political vocabulary.

is not only implicit in its primary meaning of the public good, but was also a quite natural consequence of its developing use as a synonym for the realm or kingdom. Of themselves, however, these factors do not fully explain the powerful resonance and pivotal function which the idea of the commonweal rapidly attained in the political language of sixteenth century Scots. In addition, we must look also at the close relationship which developed between the concept of the commonweal and the medieval vocabulary of freedom. It was argued in the previous chapter that writers such as Barbour and Fordun had charged the Latin word 'libertas' and its vernacular equivalents 'liberty' and 'freedom' with immense rhetorical power and that it was in these terms that the political community at large had articulated its conviction in the autonomous origins and continuing independence of the realm. In fact, this potent vocabulary continued to be used in much the same way and with much the same rhetorical force throughout the period discussed in this study. It was, however, increasingly used in conjunction with the idea of the commonweal and, apparently by virtue of this close association, the latter acquired a remarkably strong patriotic inflection. For example, as we shall see in a later chapter, the phrase 'the commonweal and liberty of the realm' was used as a patriotic political slogan during the wars with England of the 1540's, while by the end of that decade the commonweal by itself was being employed in a manner which set off all the emotive resonances triggered in the middle ages by the clarion-cry of freedom.<sup>1</sup> It was almost certainly this kind of emotionally charged

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1. See below, chapter 6.



usage which ensured the commonweal a dominant role in the normative language of the sixteenth century Scottish political community. After all, not only did it imply the public welfare of the realm through the exercise of virtuous kingship, but it also embodied the Scots' most deep-rooted patriotic aspirations. In many respects, therefore, it acted as a bridge or conceptual link between two realms of public discourse - between the vocabulary of kingship and the vocabulary of freedom - which had been only loosely connected in the medieval period.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, through the multi-faceted idea of the commonweal, they had become almost inseparable, while at the same time the language of Scottish politics had acquired a conceptual tool of peculiar and powerful resonance.

Chronologically, the above analysis has taken us some way ahead of our story. In fact, however, we need look no further than John Bellenden's vernacular translation of Boece's Scotorum Historiae for an example of the extended use of what we may now legitimately call the language of the commonweal. The limits and implications of Bellenden's use of this mode of discourse will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, but it is worth pointing out here the consonance of his understanding of the idea of the commonweal itself with the various shades of meaning isolated above. In the first

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1. In effect, the term rapidly came to encapsulate and convey the two main points of the most elementary contemporary theory of kingship: namely, that it was the duty of the king to defend his realm and to ensure the equitable administration of justice within it. This theory is implicit in the works discussed both in this and the previous chapter, but for a more explicit statement, see Sir John Fortescue, De Laudibus Legum Anglie, ed. S. B. Chrimes (Cambridge, 1949), 2.



place, Bellenden employed the term most often in the exact same sense as Lindsay to mean the public welfare of the realm and references to acts and events which cause 'damage to the commonweal' are legion throughout the History.<sup>1</sup> These, moreover, are often also directly associated with aspects of kingship - the administration of justice, the defence of the realm, the suppression of rebels - as well as with the virtues or otherwise of individual kings.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, although the rhetoric of freedom common among medieval writers figures prominently in the History, it is occasionally used in conjunction with the concept of the commonweal and sometimes even subsumed within it. For example, Bellenden refers not only to the respect which such heroes as Robert Bruce had for 'the commonweal and liberty of Scotland', but also to patriots fighting to the death 'for their commonweal'.<sup>3</sup> Finally, as this last example suggests, there are times in the History when the commonweal is plainly being used, not literally, but in much the same way - although perhaps with greater rhetorical weight - as such words as realm, nation and kingdom. There are references, for example, to a commonweal being governed, to a commonweal perishing for lack of a head, and to a king importing clerics and craftsmen to ornament his commonweal.<sup>4</sup> At a minimum count, the term occurs more than 150 times in the History and many more examples could be cited to illustrate the nuances of its meaning and usage. What should be quite clear already, however, is its flexibility and its consequent

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1. E.g., Bellenden, History, i, 42, 59, 177-8; 199, 233, 257, 283, and ii, 55, 119, 166, 235, 300, 434.

2. E.g., *ibid.*, i, 31, 50, 177-8, 199, and ii, 119, 166, 235.

3. E.g., *ibid.*, i, 258, and ii, 17, 263.

4. *Ibid.*, ii, 224, 150-1, 481 respectively.

capacity to focus several disparate elements of Scottish political thinking within a single protean concept. To invoke the commonweal was certainly not simply to renounce 'singular profit' and make routine obeisance to a theoretical altruism. On the contrary, in the public discourse of sixteenth century Scotland, it was also to rouse deep-seated expectations of kingship, to raise the hackles of an aggressive patriotism, and to rally these emotions around an idealized conception of a unique and autonomous political community.

In Boece's chronicle, moreover, that ideal community was not only described, but also endowed with the massive prescriptive legitimacy of two millennia of continuous historical experience. In a sense, therefore, the History added an historical dimension to the language of the commonweal which lent it in turn the enormous moral force implicit in an awareness of a common ancestry and shared past. Boece himself was acutely conscious of the power which such an awareness of historical continuity could exert and commented sharply on Edward I of England's deliberate efforts to destroy the chronicles of Scotland so that 'the memorie of Scottis suld peris' and his hopes of union be more quickly realized.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, his own Scotorum Historiae was designed to reinforce that continuity and demonstrate conclusively the independent historical referents of the Scots. In this he was perhaps simply following the lead of his patron, William Elphinstone, and the History may even have been composed as a secular

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1. Ibid., ii, 377-8.



counterpart to the bishop's Aberdeen Breviary.<sup>1</sup> The latter, published in two volumes in 1509-10, was the crowning achievement of Myllar and Chepman's short-lived printing-press and the main reason why it received royal patronage. Elphinstone was intent on replacing alien liturgical and devotional works (such as the Sarum or Salisbury use) with ones of specifically Scottish complexion and the accompanying saints' lives were designed to resurrect the memory of native religious leaders such as Columba, Andrew, Duthac, Ninian and Mungo.<sup>2</sup> Boece may well have intended to complement this array of spiritual talent with the exemplary lives of secular heroes such as Kings Caratak, Galdus, Kenneth, Fergus and Bruce. At the very least, the result of their joint labours was to discover and put into print a vast storehouse of native lore and legend. That done, the Scottish political community had access to a richer and more continuous historical record - both temporal and spiritual - than had ever before been available to it.

It is conceivable that, in their efforts to establish and reinforce unique historical referents for their countrymen, men such as Elphinstone and Boece were responding to an increased awareness of 'nationhood' engendered by the powerful combination of the 'new

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1. Little is known of Boece's motives, but in writing his History he claimed in part to be following a work composed by Elphinstone. He also stressed the bishop's great love of Scottish antiquities and his researches into the lives of Scottish saints. Finally, in the same place, he again remarked on English efforts to destroy Scotland's 'memorable glories' (Boece, Episcoporum Vitae, 99-100).
  2. Breviarii Aberdonensis (Bannatyne Club, 1854). Whether Elphinstone was as inventive in his discovery of Scottish saints as was Boece in his resurrection of Scottish kings is a question which cannot be pursued here.



learning' and the 'new monarchies'. Certainly, there is no doubt that towards the end of the fifteenth century Scotland did experience a wave of self-conscious patriotism which manifested itself in a deliberate attempt, perhaps typified by Elphinstone, to recover and preserve the community's cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> In political terms too there is evidence of a new self-consciousness in the Scottish parliament's unprecedented assertion of 1469 that James III possessed 'ful jurisdictione and fre empire within his realme'.<sup>2</sup> This apparent application of the Bartolist formula rex in regno suo est imperator - a dictum of a piece with James III's more general imperial pretensions<sup>3</sup> - suggests an increased confidence in the importance of the Scottish kingdom and a corresponding determination to place it on a par with other western European realms. Nevertheless, although these developments were certainly of considerable significance, one must beware of attributing to this era nationalist sentiments or an idea of the nation state more appropriate to the modern age.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, intermittent war with England had endowed the Scots with a remarkably well-developed sense of community as well

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1. On this, see David McRoberts, 'The Scottish Church and Nationalism in the Fifteenth Century', Innes Review, XIX (1968), 3-14.
  2. Acts Parl. Scot., ii, 95.
  3. On the form and implications of James III's imperial thinking, see Macdougall, James III, 98; and Nicholson, Scotland: The Later Middle Ages, 483-4, 577. On the origins and importance of the Bartolist view of royal authority, see Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, i, 9-12. It hardly requires saying that 'imperial' used in this sense means full jurisdictional competence (on the analogy of the Holy Roman Emperor) rather than a desire for territorial expansion or domination.
  4. On these points, see J. H. Shennan, The Origins of the Modern European State 1450-1725 (London, 1974), 40-3.

as a precocious brand of xenophobia. But for the most part contemporary patriotism was focused, not on any abstract conception of a Scottish state, but on the living reality of Scottish kingship. Whether or not his subjects shared James III's dreams of imperial grandeur, they certainly believed that on the reigning monarch depended the commonweal and liberty of the realm. The symbol of Scottish freedom from overlordship as well as the source of domestic peace and order, the monarchy held the key to Scottish hopes and aspirations. This is evident throughout the works discussed in this and the previous chapter, but it emerges with particular clarity from Boece's Scotorum Historiae. A picturesque blend of chivalric and patriotic romanticism, the History is also an extended commentary on the theory and practice of Scottish kingship. In it, indeed, are articulated many of the beliefs and ideals which dominated the political thought of early sixteenth century Scots. This being the case, it is worthy of much more detailed consideration than it is generally accorded.



## Chapter Three

Boece, Bellenden and the Polity of Manners

Written in the early 1520's and published at Paris in 1527, Boece's Scotorum Historiae remained the standard account of Scotland's past until the publication in 1582 of George Buchanan's Rerum Scoticarum Historia. Beginning with the country's legendary origins in the remotest antiquity, it carries the story forward in seventeen lively and compelling books until the death of James I in 1436. Its extraordinary amalgam of fact and fiction has led one critic to dub it 'a luminous example of misapplied genius, a sort of memento mori to all serious enquirers after historical truth'.<sup>1</sup> Nor is the judgment invalid, for bereft of any critical analysis and lacking any sense of anachronism, the History is both timeless and credulous, a fitting and largely forgotten memorial to the worst excesses of Renaissance historiography. Such short-comings, however, probably increased rather than diminished its contemporary popularity and, particularly after the publication in Scotland of John Bellenden's great vernacular translation in the later 1530's, it won widespread acceptance. In fact, like the Scotichronicon before it, the History was the subject of abridgements, continuations and even versification in the half century following its initial publication.<sup>2</sup> It was superseded only by Buchanan's History of

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1. J. B. Black, 'Boece's Scotorum Historiae', in Quatercentenary of the Death of Hector Boece (Aberdeen, 1937), 30-53, at 30.

2. Apart from Bellenden's translation, a further metrical Scots version was composed by William Stewart between 1531 and 1535. There are also extant some other incomplete vernacular translations which never saw publication in the sixteenth century. In 1538 a French translation of selections from the History appeared in Paris and a second Latin edition with a continuation up to 1488 by John Ferrerius was printed in Paris in 1574. Finally, the historical works of John Lesley and Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie as well as of Buchanan are all revisions or continuations of Boece's chronicle.



1582, a work which, as we shall see in a later chapter, far from upsetting the interpretation of Scotland's past laid down by Boece, served rather to confirm and entrench it. Evidently Boece had written very much what Scotsmen were pleased to hear, either confirming prejudices and preconceptions already ingrained among them or generating new ones which they were quick to accept and endorse. Far from being simply an antiquarian curiosity, therefore, the Scotorum Historiae must be considered a key document in any investigation of Scottish political thought in the sixteenth century. Indeed, to analyse the beliefs and ideals which animate Boece's story is in many respects to analyse also those of the contemporary political community at large.

## I

The most blatant feature of the Scotorum Historiae and the one best calculated to win the hearts of its sixteenth century Scottish readers is undoubtedly its intense patriotic bias. As will become clear in a moment, Boece exploited to the full the historiographical tradition established by John of Fordun in the late fourteenth century which located the foundation of the kingdom by Fergus I in 330 B.C. and traced a line of over one hundred kings from that date until the late medieval period. Scotland was thus among the most ancient kingdoms of Europe, fit to rank with France, Spain and England in terms of antiquity and endurance. According to Boece, moreover, unlike these other kingdoms, Scotland had maintained its independence intact throughout its long and colourful history. When, for example, all Europe succumbed to the might of the Roman legions and groaned under

the yoke of imperial tutelage, Scotland alone succeeded in preserving its integrity and, in a long and noble struggle, never once submitted to slavery and subjection. While the kings of the Britons became puppets of the Roman emperors and thereafter fell in rapid succession to the Saxons, the Danes and finally the Normans, the Scots - led by their illustrious race of kings - resisted the Romans, exterminated the Picts, briefly subjected the Britons, repulsed the Danes and for centuries refused to recognize the baseless claims to superiority and suzerainty made by a succession of arrogant English monarchs. In Boece's expert hands, this is a tale - however fabulous - well and stirringly told, redolent of heroism in the face of insuperable odds and always in defence of an ancient commonweal and equally ancient liberties. It was the summation of the work begun by Fordun and Bower and contributed to by many other anonymous chroniclers of the fifteenth century. In fact, in the pages of the Scotorum Historiae, the Scottish national epos assumed its final and most exotic form. This being the case, Boece's chronicle could hardly have failed to appeal to none-too-critical Scotsmen still smarting under the humiliating shadow of Flodden and watching anxiously the ambitious posturing of Henry VIII.

Given Boece's enormous debt to his medieval predecessors, it is hardly surprising that he shared not only their patriotic bias, but also their antipathy to the English Brut tradition.<sup>1</sup> His allegiances are in fact made plain before the History proper is even begun, for in

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1. For some useful comments on Boece from the perspective of the English historiographical tradition, see T. D. Kendrick, British Antiquity (London, 1950), 65-9.



the 'Cosmographie' which precedes it Boece insisted that the correct name for the island inhabited by both the Scots and the English was not Britain - as assumed by the proponents of the Brutus legend - but Albion. The Scotsman did not attempt to deny either that Brutus the Trojan was the progenitor of the Britons or that he and his followers were the first to colonize the island. On both counts, indeed, he appears to have been as convinced as the most devout of Geoffrey of Monmouth's many disciples. He did insist, however, as had Fordun before him, that Brutus ruled over and gave his name to only the southern part of Albion - that part now also known as England - and not the island as a whole whose name derived 'ab albis montibus; that is to say, fra the quhit montanis thairof, full of calk [= chalk]'. That said, he was free to argue that the Scots - the descendants of Gathelus and Scota who had voyaged from Egypt to Ireland via Spain - had found the northern half of Albion 'waist and nocht inhabit ... with ony empire of Britonis', had gone on to colonize it, and had 'callit it Scotland' in honour of their own illustrious progenitor.<sup>1</sup> In common with Fordun, in other words, Boece was prepared to accept the Brut tradition only in so far as it accorded - or could be made to appear to accord - with the autonomous origins and continuous independence of the Scots. Thus, while Albanactus (to whom Brutus had allegedly left the kingdom of Scotland) is conspicuously absent from Boece's chronicle, we have instead the most elaborate version yet of the Irish Scots' gradual colonization of the previously

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1. The History and Chronicles of Scotland : written in Latin by Hector Boece ... and translated by John Bellenden ..., ed. Thomas Maitland (Edinburgh, 1821), i, xix-xxiii. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of Bellenden's translation. For Fordun's comments on Britain and Albion, see below, chapter 4.

uninhabited north-western regions of Albion.<sup>1</sup> Of course, Boece was well aware that large parts of his story were 'richt discrepant fra the Croniklis of Britonis maid be Galfrede' (i.e., Geoffrey of Monmouth), but he believed it 'mair sowndand to the verite, to follow mony provin and attentik authoris ... than to follow the said Galfrede, writand but [= without] ony testimoniall of othir authouris, and singular in his awin opinioun'.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, he was just as suspicious as any of his Scottish predecessors of Geoffrey's account of King Arthur's vast sixth century empire and preferred to rely on Scottish authors 'quhilkis writis the trew deidis of nobill men, but [= without] ony fictioun'.<sup>3</sup> Finally, again like the medieval Scottish chroniclers, Boece would have no truck with English claims to feudal superiority over the Scottish realm. If homage was done to any king of England, he argued, it was only for lands held in the southern realm and only, as in the case of Malcolm IV, 'under this condition, "That it suld nocht be prejudiciall to the liberte of Scotland"'.<sup>4</sup>

It should by now be clear that, in refuting so conscientiously the Anglocentric interpretation of early British history fostered by Geoffrey of Monmouth and embodied in the Brut tradition, Boece

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1. Ibid., i, lff.

2. Ibid., i, 285.

3. Ibid., ii, 87. Elsewhere, with explicit reference to Arthur's alleged empire, Boece remarked that such 'historie sall have faith with thaim that ar auctouris thairof'. He then went on to say that, although Arthur's 'vailyeant dedis wer worthy to have memorie, yit the vulgare fabillis quhilkis ar fenyteit of the samin hes violat thair fame, and makis thaim to have the les credence' (ibid., ii, 82-3).

4. Ibid., ii, 308; cf. ii, 282, 315-6.



willingly - indeed enthusiastically - espoused the rival national myth elaborated by the patriotic chroniclers of medieval Scotland. Consequently, the basic chronological framework of the Scotorum Historiae conforms to that worked out by Fordun and enshrined in the Scotichronicon. That is to say, Boece adhered to the conventional view that the Scottish colony in the north-west of Albion was erected into an independent kingship under Fergus, son of Ferchard, in the mid-fourth century B.C.; that Fergus and his descendants reigned for a total of seven hundred years until in the mid-fourth century A.D. the Scottish kingdom was overthrown by an alliance of Picts and Romans; and that some fifty years later Fergus II, son of Erc, restored the realm to its former status and established the dynasty which had reigned over the Scots ever since.<sup>1</sup> Despite this conventional chronology, however, Boece was by no means content simply to repeat the history of Scotland as first broadcast by Fordun. On the contrary, he substantially embellished it with material apparently unknown to the earlier chronicler. Whereas Fordun, for example, had named only two of the forty or so monarchs who were alleged to have ruled during the first seven (mythical) centuries of the kingdom's history, Boece not only named them all but went on to describe with a wealth of circumstantial detail both their warlike deeds and the workings of the polity over which they reigned. He appears to have plundered the names of these fictitious monarchs from the royal genealogy which we encountered previously in connection with the

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1. Boece's dating is slightly, but not significantly different from that of Fordun. For example, whereas the latter had located Fergus II's refoundation of the kingdom in 403 A.D., Boece postponed it until 422 - apparently to allow Fergus to participate in Alaric the Goth's sack of Rome in 410!

inauguration of Alexander III in 1249.<sup>1</sup> The details of their heroic careers, however, must be credited to Boece's own lively imagination, for the sources whom he cites - in particular, the suspiciously-named Veremundus - are almost certainly quite spurious. What lay behind this tour de force of historical invention is an intriguing puzzle to which we will return shortly. Here it is sufficient to note that the mythical political culture which Boece attributed to the prehistoric Scots is the most significant element of his work. For if the History is unfailingly patriotic, it is also consistently didactic and the example of the ancient Scots is the benchmark against which Boece judged all subsequent generations of his compatriots.

Nowhere perhaps is the combination of patriotism and didacticism so characteristic of the History more evident than in Boece's attribution to the early Scots of an unswerving and unquenchable desire for liberty and freedom. Time and again in his chronicle he commented on their unflinching willingness to 'defend thair wiffis, children, landis, and liberteis, with all the power thay might, to the utter end of thair lif; and erar to jeoperde thaim to maist dangerus battall, than to leif in servitude'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in set speech after set speech, he had the kings of Scotland address their subjects in terms - familiar to us from the medieval period - which stressed the God-given freedom of the Scots and their duty to defend their realm in emulation of their virtuous forbears. Faced with an army of Romans,

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1. See above, p.10.

2. Bellenden, History, i, 79.



Picts and Britons, for example, Eugenius I, the thirty-ninth king of Scots, exhorted his people in the following uplifting vein:

Our eldaris, that began this realm with continewall  
laubour, and brocht the samin with honour to our  
days, forcy campionis, commandit thair posterite to  
defend thair realme and liberte, quhilk is maist  
dulce and hevinly treasoure in the erd, aganis al  
invasouris; ... I beseik yow, my gud companyeonis,  
for the unvincibill manheid, faith and virthew of  
your eldaris, and for thair pail goistis, quhilkis  
defendit this youre realme in liberte to thir dayis;  
to suffir nocht yow thair sonnys to be reft and  
spulyeit of your realme, liberteis and gudis; nor  
yit to be taikin, as cativis, to underly thair  
tyrannyis ... Knawe youreself dotat with incredi-  
bill manheid and virthew; and heritouris, be  
anciant linnage, als weill to your nobill faderis  
in wisdome and chevalrie, as in thair landis :  
nocht gaderit of divers nationis, bot of ane pepill  
under ane mind : and servandis to the Eternall God,  
that gevis victory to just pepill, in reward of  
thair virthew; and to fals and wrangus pepil schame,  
discomfiture, and slauchter.<sup>1</sup>

As this evocative passage makes abundantly clear, Boece was perfectly familiar with the conventions and implications of the medieval vocabulary of freedom. Like Barbour or Fordun before him, he naturally associated liberty with virtue and recalled the exemplary conduct of ancient forbears as the model which their descendants must emulate. In Boece's case, however, the inevitable contemporary moral is made still more explicit. It was in fact his firm conviction that the Scots of the sixteenth century had declined from the 'discipline' and 'manners' which had ensured their elders' ability to maintain the integrity and independence of the realm. This view is in evidence throughout the History, but it is made particularly clear in a short

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1. Ibid., i, 237-8. For further examples of this type of rhetoric, see ibid., i, 89-90, 105, 148-50, 168-70.

section prefaced by Bellenden to the body of his translation and entitled 'Ane prudent doctrine maid be the Auctore concerning the new Maneris and the Auld of Scottis'.<sup>1</sup> There he declared that:

... sindry nobill men hes desirit me to schaw the auld maneris of Scottis, quhilkis ar skatterit in sindry partis of this Buke, under ane compendius treit, that it may be knawin, how far we, in thir present dayis, ar different fra the manneris and leiffing of our auld faderis.

He then went on to lament that his contemporaries had degenerated from 'the notable strength, vigour, and soverane virtew' of their ancestors and now 'in thir dayis, ar drownit in all manner of avarice and lust'. According to Bellenden, the courage and fortitude of the 'auld faderis', their strength of mind and body, were founded on temperance - 'the fontane of all virtew' - a temperance partly enforced by the Spartan rigour of their physical environment and partly adopted voluntarily as a means of preserving their unsullied virtue. Over the centuries, however, temperance had been overwhelmed by luxury - introduced largely through a too close association with vain-glorious English manners - the pristine virtue of the ancients had been abandoned and the Scots now wallowed in lust, avarice and gluttony. The present generation, he maintained, had lost 'the soverane manheid of thair eldaris' and, nourished on 'all maner of droggis and electuaries' plus the 'new delicius metis and winis' of Spain and Greece, Africa and Asia, had grown 'effeminat and soft'. If in the present, warned Bellenden, the Scots lived in relative tranquility, it

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1. Ibid., i, liv-lxi, from where all the following quotations are drawn.



was 'mair be benevolence and sleuth of our nichtbouris, than ony manlie prowis of our self'.

This decline of the Scots from Spartan austerity to slothful decadence is the central thesis of Boece's History, lending it both thematic unity and a rudimentary temporal perspective. Its consonance with the preoccupations and ethical preconceptions of the medieval writers should be readily apparent. With perhaps a nod in the direction of Livy's famous argument that Roman virtue was similarly corrupted when temperance gave way to avarice and voluptuous living, Boece has done little more than locate the conflict between the seven deadly sins and the seven theological and cardinal virtues in a native historical context. There, however, the conflict could be readily conflated with patriotism by invoking the 'auld faderis' (as, of course, his predecessors had done) and equating their virtue with their successful struggle to maintain the freedom of the realm. Boece was perhaps idiosyncratic in his obsession with temperance as the root of virtue and still more so in defining intemperance almost exclusively in terms of over-eating. Fortunately, however, he has left a clear statement of his understanding of the consequences of dietary indulgence and, although quite lengthy, it is worth quoting in full as an example both of his use of the paradigm of corrupted virtue and of his conflation of it with pronounced Anglophobia. Describing the return of James I to Scotland after a prolonged period of captivity in England, Boece had Bishop Henry Wardlaw address him as follows:

... sindry nobill men, sic as war thy freindis in  
England, ar cumin in this cuntre, not unworthy to  
have thy favour. Howbeit thay have brocht with  
thame the maneris of Inglisemen, quhilkis ar richt

dammageus to thy pepill. And thocht thair maneris be not schamfully to thair awin cuntre, becaus thair pepill is accustomit thairwith; I think it is ane gret sin to rut thy pepill into sic vennomus maneris : I mene, thir superflew and costlie coursis of metis that they persuade men to eit and drink, mair than is sufficient to the nurising of nature. Will thow considder the temperance usit amang our auld faderis, thow sall find nothing sa contrarius thairto as this new glutony brocht now amang us ... in quatsumevir way this unhappy custome is cum amang us, it is to be contempnit, for the mony viciis that followis thairapon; sic as ar intemperance, lust, sleuth, reif, and wasting of gudis : for gif temperance be nurisar of al virtew, than intemperance is moder till al vice. Forthir, lust and intemperance ar sa knit togidder, that thay may na wayis be severit fra othir : and he that is servand to his wambe, man obey al thingis that it desiris. Than followis, be lust of wambe, defloration of virginis, adultre, and incest. Thir mischevis and vennome of young men followis onely be superflewite of metis and drinkis : and fra ane man be gevin anis to pleseir of his wambe, he becumis idill, but ony thocht of thingis to cum, and ay the mair that the ingine of man is gevin thairto, the mair feirsly rinnis he till every kind of vice.<sup>1</sup>

Both Boece's premise and his deductions from it may be questionable, but it is undeniably in terms of this conceptual framework that he perceived the processes of history and diagnosed the deficiencies of the Scottish polity. What rudimentary temporal perspective the History has is provided by the notion of cyclical decay and regeneration, luxury and the consequent corruption being the causal agents in

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1. Ibid., ii, 504.



the decline of virtue.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, whatever thematic unity the work possesses is supplied by the Scots' constant endeavour to recapture the pristine virtue displayed by their heroic ancestors. For Boece, the distinguishing characteristic of the 'auld faderis' was their austerity and he clearly believed that Scotland's survival as a unique and autonomous polity depended on a revival of their ancient discipline and a return to their temperate manners.

Writing at a time of civil disturbance and upheaval, Boece was rarely over-optimistic. Nevertheless, both he and Bellenden did believe that a recrudescence of the ancient Scottish virtues was still possible even amid the effete decadence of the sixteenth century. Bellenden believed, indeed, that 'in sindry partis of this realme, remanis yit the futsteppis of many auld vertewis usit sum time amang our eldaris'.<sup>2</sup> This was particularly the case in those areas of Scotland - the Highlands and Islands - which because of their inaccessibility had remained untainted by luxurious living. The Highlanders, for example, because they had had 'na repair with merchandis of uncouth realmes', were 'nocht corrupit, nor mingit with uncouth blude' and were 'the more strang and rude, and may suffir mair hungir,

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1. This is perhaps best illustrated by Boece's account of the twelfth century spread of feudalism within Scotland, a development which he characteristically interpreted in terms of a degeneration from the ancient discipline brought about by 'the riotus and superflew maneris quhilkis war brocht in this realme be cuming of Inglismen with King Malcolm' (ibid., ii, 284-5). Elsewhere, Bellenden agreed with this analysis, adding only that as a result the Scots 'war gevin, efter the arrogance and pride of Inglismen, to vane glorie and ambition of honouris, and began that time to seke new names of nobilite ...' (ibid., i, lix-lx).

2. Ibid., i, lxi-lxii.

walking, and distres, than ony uthir peple of Albion'.<sup>1</sup> The point is not unimportant, for in locating the source of the kingdom's virtue in the north and west and indicating that it was the manners of the Highlanders that contemporary Scots were to emulate, Boece and Bellenden were attempting to minimize the gap between Highland and Lowland culture which other contemporaries - including John Mair - tended to emphasize. For them, therefore, not only the autonomy but also the internal cohesion of the realm depended on the strict emulation of the manners and discipline of the ancients as these were still practised in the remoter parts of the kingdom. As we shall see, this was a vision of primitive Celtic virtue which was to feature also in the writings of George Buchanan.

## II

Although illustrated with a wealth of historical detail, the elements of Boece's thinking outlined above do not differ in essentials from those we encountered in the medieval period. Boece merely projected back into Scotland's mythical prehistory concerns and aspirations which he shared with his fourteenth and fifteenth century predecessors. The vast canvas he had to fill - the seven centuries left virtually blank by Fordun - certainly gave him ample scope for improvisation, but in describing an ancient Scottish polity of manners

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1. Ibid., i, xxvi. For similar references to Orkney and Shetland, see *ibid.*, i, li-lii.



Boece did little more than add an historical - or mythological<sup>1</sup> - dimension to the ideals and beliefs embodied in the medieval vocabulary of freedom. Thus the virtuous forbears who figure so prominently in the literature of the middle ages are not simply invoked but described in minute detail, while the virtues which sustained them in defence of Scotland's freedom are not simply adumbrated but exemplified in lengthy accounts of their heroic deeds. In effect, the patriotic ideology which pervades the writings of the medieval poets and chroniclers is realized in and legitimated by the flesh-and-blood warriors who people the early books of Boece's epic tale. As with his predecessors, however, Boece's attention never strayed far from the figure of the prince himself. After all, not only was Scotland's ancient monarchy the symbol of its freedom, but on the king's moral bearing - his propensity for virtue or for vice, for temperate or intemperate living - depended also the welfare of the realm. As Boece succinctly (if repetitively) put it: 'Gif the king be virtews, the pepil, be his imitation, inclinis to virtew. Quhen he is vicius, the pepil, on the samin maner, followis his vices'.<sup>2</sup> In many respects, the History can be read as a commentary on and exemplification of this commonplace dictum.

The early books of Boece's chronicle are in fact punctuated by a series of royal portraits which amply illustrate not only the

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1. In the sense that it is a story designed both as an argument for and an explanation of Scottish freedom, Boece's work is in fact closer in structure and intent to a political or national myth than to history as such. For some illuminating remarks on this which are applicable to the kind of interpretation of the History offered here, see Henry Tudor, Political Myth (London, 1972), esp. 123-4.

2. Bellenden, History, ii, 123.

political dynamic inherent in the manners of a prince, but also the author's conception of the duties and obligations which kingship entails. This can best be demonstrated by juxtaposing Boece's descriptions of two fictitious kings who displayed quite different characters. Take, for example, Fynnane, the tenth king of Scots:

Efter the deith of Josyne, his son Fynnane, ane wise and virtuous prince, was maid king. He was sa gret luffar of justice, that he richely rewar-dit all the capitaneis of the tribis, quhare he fand thaim luffaris of the commounweill. He gaf his hale attendance to win the hertis of his pepill, and maid na exercition nor ministration of justice but advise of his nobillis. He ekit the nowmer of his counsail with ma senatouris than was afore, to mak thaim the more renommit. He maid ane law, that the king sall do na thing, concerning the publik administratioun of his realme, but advise of his nobillis. He maid als ane uther law, that the king sall nothir denounce weir, nor treit peace, but advise of the capitaneis of tribis. Be thir, and siclike constitutionis, King Fynnane conquest gret favour and benivolence of his pepill. Be thir maner of governance, he maid him sa strang amang his lieges, that he was never assailieit efter with ony uncouth weris, and grew in gret abundance of riches.<sup>1</sup>

In Boece's moral universe, however, an abundance of riches leads only to corruption, as the reign of Fynnane's son and successor Durstus clearly bears out:

This Durstus, be insolent youth, wes gevin to drounkness and unbridelit lust; and sa different fra his faderis governance, that he haitit all thaim that his fader luffit. He brak the ordour of law that wes institute afore be his progenitouris, for ministratioun of justice. He usit na counsall in gret matteris, but onlie of thaim that favorit his vicious maneris, and culd find to him

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1. Ibid., i, 53.



new maner of lustis. He was sa mischevus ane tyrane, that all the nobill men, that his fader usit on his secret counsall, war be him other slane or banist; or ellis, be feinyeit causis, forfaltit of thair landis and gudis.<sup>1</sup>

The contrast is stark and revealing. Fynnane's government is characterized by consideration and restraint, that of Durstus by selfishness and unfettered passions. The roots of tyranny lie in excessive indulgence, in drunkenness and unbridled lust; virtue and true kingship are synonymous with temperance. In either case, the commonweal of the realm - its welfare or otherwise - depends on the manners of the prince. Explicit here too, moreover, is Boece's conception of what good kingship entails : a virtuous prince is one who places the common good above his own interests, is particularly attentive to the equitable administration of justice, and never follows the whims of upstart counsellors but, in all great matters, seeks the advice of his nobility. Conversely, a tyrant is one who, corrupted by low-born favourites and familiars, ignores justice and the commonweal and governs only to satisfy his own vicious desires and appetites. Examples of both these royal types are legion throughout the early books of the History. Not unexpectedly, therefore, in the 'Proheme of the History' Bellenden exhorted James V to peruse thoroughly the manners of these fictitious ancestors in the hope that, like Fynnane, he might, 'be prudent governing, / Als weill his honour as his realme decore, / And be ane virtuus and ane noble king'.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., i, 55.

2. Ibid., i, cxi.

Indeed, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, Bellenden was well aware of the History's potential as a speculum principis, a mirror in which James V could view the royal virtues to which he must aspire and the vices which he was obliged at all costs to eschew. Nor is this surprising, for as regards good and bad governance Boece's portraits of the early Scottish kings explore almost every conceivable permutation of the basic scenario inherent in his highly conventional view of the ideal political order and the reasons for its breakdown. Fortunately, it is unnecessary to illustrate this in detail as the conceptual framework within which Boece wrote is succinctly set out by Bellenden in the letter addressed to James V which he appended to his translation of the chronicle. In it he sought to epitomize on the king's behalf 'the braid difference ... betwix kingis and tyrannis' and, in so doing, he revealed the nature and limits of Boece's wholly unoriginal conception of politics and the political world:

... as Seneca sayis, in his Tragedies : all are nocht kingis that bene clothit with purpoure and diademe : bot onely thay that sekis no singulare proffet, in damage of thair commoun weill; and sa vigilant, that the life of thair subdittis is mair deir and precius to thaim than thair awin life. Ane tyrane sekis riches; ane king sekis honoure conquest be virtew. Ane tyrane governis his realme be slauchter, dredoure, and falset; ane king gidis his realme be prudence, integrite, and favour. Ane tyrane suspekis all thaim that hes riches, gret dominoun, autorite, or gret rentis; ane king haldis sic men for his maist helply freindis. Ane tyrane luffis nane but vane fleschouris, vicius and wickit limmaris, be quhais counsall he ragis in slauchter and tyranny : ane king luffis men of wisdom, gravite, and science; knowing weill, that his gret materis may be weill dressit be thair prudence.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid., ii, 515.



Despite the reference to Seneca, this description of kingship and tyranny derives ultimately from the fifth book of Aristotle's Politics and variations on it are a commonplace of contemporary mirror-of-princes literature.<sup>1</sup> They are a commonplace too of the Scotorum Historiae, for as Bellenden went on to inform James V all the 'properteis' just described 'sal be patent, in reding the livis of gud and evil kingis, in the history precedent'.<sup>2</sup> In Fynnane, Durstus and a host of other fictitious monarchs are portrayed all the characteristics of both an ideal prince and a wicked tyrant, while in the histories of their varied fortunes the importance of justice and good counsel and the evils of flattery and self-interest are amply and eloquently demonstrated. In effect, as with the idea of freedom, Boece had taken the opportunity presented by the seven undocumented centuries of Scottish history to exemplify and reinforce the political preconceptions of his age. Not surprisingly, therefore, the monarchy emerges from the History, not only as a symbol of the Scots'

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1. Cf. Aristotle, The Politics, ed. and trans. T. A. Sinclair (Penguin edtn., Harmondsworth, 1962), V, 10 : 'A king aims to be a protector - of the owners of property against unfair losses, of the people against oppression. But a tyrant, as has often been said, does not look to the public wish, unless it happens to coincide with his personal interest. The tyrant's aim is his pleasure, the king's his duty. Hence they differ even in their appetites and ambitions; the tyrant grasps at money, the king at honour. A king's bodyguard is made up of citizens, a tyrant's of foreign mercenaries'. In his Education of a Christian Prince, to which Bellenden refers at the beginning of his 'Translatouris Epistil', Erasmus relies heavily on this and other passages from the Politics in distinguishing between kingship and tyranny (see Born edtn. [New York, 1936], 162ff). Interestingly, Boece himself possessed a Latin edition of Aristotle, Politicorum et Oeconomicorum libri (Paris, 1490) - see W. Douglas Simpson, 'Hector Boece', in Quatercentenary, 7-29, at 24.

2. Bellenden, History, ii, 516.

patriotic aspirations, but also as the linchpin of their unique and autonomous political culture. Just as the ancient kings had led the defence of Scottish freedom and liberty, so on them also had rested responsibility for justice and the commonweal. These were lessons - essentially no different from those which Fordun and Barbour had impressed upon medieval kings - which Boece and Bellenden were no less keen to impress upon the youthful mind of King James V.<sup>1</sup>

In at least one respect, however, Boece does appear to break with the traditions and conventions established by his predecessors. For the early books of the History suggest that he believed that a prince who, through unfettered vice or the advice of flattering counsellors, imposed a tyrannical regime upon his subjects might not simply be admonished to mend his ways, but might actually be deposed and even executed. In the case of Durstus, for example, his 'treson and falset ... was nocht lang unpunist' and, to Boece's evident delight, the 'vicious tyrane' was quickly 'spulyeit of his liffe and crown'.<sup>2</sup> Nor was Durstus the only tyrant to suffer in this way. The early centuries of Scottish history reveal many such examples of tyrannicide, a sample of which will give some indication of the grounds of resistance as well as an insight into Boece's lurid - and often comic - interpretation of the implications of intemperance. Ewin III, for instance, the sixteenth king of Scots, 'the maist

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1. In effect, therefore, Bellenden was merely alluding to contemporary expectations of kingship when he told James V that he had translated the History 'that your Hienes may knaw the vailyeant and nobil dedis done be your progenitouris, and have cognasance how this realme hes bene governit thir MDCCC yeris bygane' (see *ibid.*, ii, 514).

2. *Ibid.*, i, 57.



vicious man in erd ... so effeminat and soupit in lust' that he had 'ane hundreth concubinis chosin of the nobillest matronis and virginis of his cuntre' and was still never satiated, was deposed by the nobility and later slain. In the same way, Dardannus, the twentieth king, although initially 'nocht far discordant fra the maneris of ane gud prince', soon 'left all thingis pertenant to justice, and slaid in every king of vice', until the nobility conspired against him, deposed and slew him. Finally, Lugtak, the twenty-second king, 'ane odious and mischevus tyrane' who with unbridled lust seduced 'his antis, his douchteris, his sisteris, and his sisteris douchteris; and was penitent of na thing, bot only that he micht not suffice to complait his lust with thaim all', was once again disposed of by the nobility.<sup>1</sup> In all, according to Father Thomas Innes, thirteen out of the first forty fictitious kings as described by Boece were 'either arraigned, or deposed, or punished, or put to death by their subjects'.<sup>2</sup> In other words, at a time when in France and England the supreme virtue of obedience was being lauded to the skies, Boece's History provided numerous precedents for the inflammatory principles of resistance and tyrannicide.<sup>3</sup>

It is with this in mind that we must return to the thorny problem of Boece's sources. For it has been argued that, in furnishing these

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1. Ibid., i, 83-4, 129-30, 164-5.

2. See Thomas Innes, A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain or Scotland (repr., Edinburgh, 1885), where the offending - or offended - monarchs are tabulated between pp.140-1 (Table II, Col. I).

3. For some examples of the contemporary emphasis on unstinting obedience, see W. F. Church, Constitutional Thought in Sixteenth Century France (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), esp. 43-73; and F. Le Van Baumer, The Early Tudor Theory of Kingship (New Haven, 1940), esp. 85-119.

examples of deposition, Boece was the innocent victim of a cunning political faction which, anxious to justify the overthrow of James III in 1488, fabricated a chronicle by the aforementioned Veremundus, filled it with examples of apparently justifiable tyrannicide, and foisted it upon a wholly unsuspecting Hector Boece.<sup>1</sup> This argument is lent some credence by the unmistakable similarity between Boece's account of the fate of tyrants such as Durstus and the interpretations of James III's reign which occur in later sixteenth century chronicles.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the king is corrupted by low-born favourites, neglects both justice and the commonweal and is eventually taken to task by an upright and virtuous nobility. Despite the similarity, however, there are at least two reasons for doubting this explanation of why Boece insisted that so many Scottish monarchs were deposed and executed. In the first place, it is hard to see why it was felt necessary in the early 1520's to provide historical precedents for events which had occurred more than thirty years previously and which were no longer - so far as is known - of pressing political concern. In other words, who were these politicians who

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1. This argument was first put forward in Innes, Critical Essay, 130-69, and is repeated in Black, 'Boece's Scotorum Historiae', 46-53. For a view more akin to that taken here, see A. A. M. Duncan, 'Hector Boece and the Medieval Tradition', in Scots Antiquaries and Historians (Abertay Historical Society, Dundee, 1972), 1-11, at 10-11.
  2. On the growth of the legendary history of James III and its eventual apotheosis in the works of Buchanan, Pitscottie and their contemporaries, see N. A. T. Macdougall, James III : A Political Study (Edinburgh, 1982), Ch.12, and the same author's 'The Sources : A Reappraisal of the Legend', in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London, 1977), 10-32. In addition, I am indebted to several illuminating discussions with Dr. Macdougall on the subject of Boece's History and its relationship (or otherwise) with the James III legend.



were still so worried about what had happened in 1488 and why did they suddenly in the 1520's decide to do something about it? Secondly, even if such worried politicians did exist in the 1520's, it is equally hard to see why they should have wanted to provide precedents for a deposition when, according to the official version of events, James III was not deposed at all, but merely 'happinit to be slane' during or after the battle of Sauchieburn in 1488.<sup>1</sup> Although the legend of James III and his evil, upstart counsellors was already beginning to take shape in the 1520's and 1530's, the idea that the king was deliberately deposed was not in fact mooted until the 1560's when George Buchanan saw the possibility of turning the existing legend - as well as Boece's fictitious kings - to good account as precedents for the overthrow of Mary Stewart. Before then, the idea of deposition had no place in the highly conventionalized accounts of James III's reign such as we have already encountered in David Lindsay's poem The Testament of the Papyngo.<sup>2</sup> It is most unlikely, therefore, that anyone before 1567 - and least of all those who were involved in the events of 1488 - would have wanted to substitute the convenient fact that the king had happened to be killed at Sauchieburn with the inconvenient fiction that he was deliberately deposed. In other words, why go to such enormous lengths to provide

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1. See Macdougall, James III, 258-60, where it is made clear that the official line taken by the rebels after the king's death was that they had not intended any harm to the king's person and that his unfortunate demise was the work of 'vile treasonable personis'. Whether this was actually the case or not is less important in the present context than the fact that it appears to have been accepted as the truth both then and for some time thereafter.

2. See above, pp.65-6.

historical precedents for something which never actually had occurred, which nobody was in fact saying had occurred, and which it was in nobody's interest to believe had occurred? As an explanation of Boece's penchant for tyrannicide, the events of 1488 seem in the last analysis to raise more questions than they can possibly answer.

Yet what other explanation is there? To provide one, we must first question the assumption that Boece believed that what he wrote was literal historical truth. Those who have argued that Boece was duped into accepting as genuine a source concocted by certain unsavoury politicians have also worked on the assumption that Boece himself was a man of the utmost integrity who would not have deliberately falsified the story of Scotland's past. That is, they have accepted at face value the hyperbolic tribute to Boece made by Erasmus to the effect that 'he could not tell a lie'.<sup>1</sup> At the very least, this is a large - not to say wild - assumption which there seems little reason to credit. As with many other Renaissance histories, there is nothing in the Scotorum Historiae to suggest that Boece was at all squeamish about altering historical fact to achieve a desired rhetorical effect. On the contrary, throughout the chronicle historical truth is clearly of much less importance than the moral truths which the past is being used to explain and exemplify. Factual accuracy, in other words, is strictly subordinate to the didactic purpose which the History was primarily designed to serve and, as should by now be clear, Boece was intent not only on chronicling the Scottish past, but also - and pre-eminently - on illustrating how best to preserve the commonweal

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1. For Erasmus' precise words, see Simpson, 'Hector Boece', 29.



and liberty of the realm. Now, by common consent, the qualities necessary to achieve these ends were most fully exemplified in the conduct of the Scots' 'virtuous elders'. So why not fill out the otherwise barren centuries of Scotland's earliest history with a panoramic vista depicting those 'manners' on which the well-being of the country was reputed to depend? To do so was doubtless to offend against the canons of modern - and even some contemporary<sup>1</sup> - historical scholarship, but it did not offend either against the rhetorical aims of a great deal of humanist historiography or, more importantly, against the national epos embodied in the Scottish medieval chronicle tradition. Indeed, not only did Boece's inventiveness further the History's homiletic end, but it did so in a way which was completely and compellingly true to the spirit of a patriotic myth which was of enormous significance to his Scottish contemporaries. His frequent references to an otherwise unknown source merely lent additional verisimilitude to an account of Scotland's past which, although much more detailed, was no different in outline or intent from that which we know to have been used to reinforce and explain the distinct nature of their political culture to generations of Scots since the Wars of Independence. Viewed in these terms, the fact that Veremundus was almost certainly a figment of Boece's imagination is much less important than the fact that the Scotorum Historiae provided sixteenth century Scots with a more complete explanation and

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1. In particular, the work of Italian and French lawyers and philologists whose pioneering studies, apparently quite unknown to Boece, are discussed in Donald R. Kelley, The Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship : Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance (New York, 1970).

anatomy of their unique political environment than had ever before been available to them.<sup>1</sup>

However, even if a combination of patriotism and didacticism is accepted as an adequate explanation of Boece's extraordinary inventiveness, there remains still the question of why tyrannicide should have figured so prominently in Scotland's mythical prehistory. Of course, although we have ruled out James III's 'deposition' as a specific influence on the content of the History, it is possible that Boece wished to illustrate a general constitutional principle to which he believed the Scots had in the past adhered and which he thought they ought in the present to revive. It is possible, indeed, that he was familiar with a Scottish academic tradition of radical political thought which, deriving from the fifteenth century conciliar movement, found its fullest and finest flowering in the works of the scholastic theologian, John Mair.<sup>2</sup> Despite the ready availability of this tradition, however, the History provides no evidence that Boece was influenced by the kind of radical scholasticism purveyed by Mair and his fellow conciliarists. As will become clear in the following chapter, Boece's crude accounts of the fate of Scotland's tyrannical rulers bear little resemblance to the quite sophisticated

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1. The only factor militating against seeing Boece's source as a fabrication is the fact that David Chambers (Lord Ormond) in his Histoire Abregee de tous les Rois de France, Angleterre et Escosse ... (Paris, 1579), also makes reference to Veremundus. As Chambers relied heavily on Boece, however, it seems unnecessary to take this citation too seriously.
  2. On the roots and development of this tradition, see in particular J. H. Burns, 'The Conciliarist Tradition in Scotland', Scottish Historical Review, XLII (1963), 89-104. See also the same author's Scottish Churchmen and the Council of Basle (Glasgow, 1962). Mair's views are discussed more fully in chapter 4.



constitutional theory subscribed to by Mair. Moreover, had they done so, it is unlikely that the History would have received the royal patronage which James V accorded it. Indeed, the very fact that the king took such an interest in Boece's work suggests that the depositions which enliven its early books were not seen as illustrations of a constitutional principle at all. On the contrary, it seems much more reasonable to suppose that they were seen simply as exemplars of the moral principle that, as Bellenden himself put it, 'ane man of vicious life hes ane vicious ending'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, this is the impression given by the language of the History itself where Boece repeatedly implied that, by the workings of an ineluctable - if ill-defined - providence, tyrants would either destroy themselves or be destroyed by those they had exploited and oppressed.<sup>2</sup> In short, as far as Boece himself was concerned, the fate of Durstus and his ilk seems to have provided examples, not so much of the accountability of kings to their subjects, but of the hideous and unavoidable consequences of the continual abuse of princely power. Accordingly, the lesson to be

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1. Bellenden, History, ii, 516. The 'non-constitutional' nature of the depositions is still further suggested by Bellenden's very next sentence: '... and nocht onely kingis and princis bene dejeckit fra thair imperial estait, quhen thay war aberrant fra virtuous discipline, bot mony nobill baronis on that same maner, quhen thay, be proude insolence, war repugnant to thair superior'. The implication of this seems to be that anyone who is vicious will receive his just desserts.

2. For example, Boece writes that a tyrant's injustices 'micht nocht be lang unpunist' in a manner which is highly suggestive of the inevitability of his fate (see *ibid.*, i, 165, 174). Elsewhere, he writes of the tyrant Nathalak that 'unstabil fortoun brocht all his felicite unto ane drery fine' (*ibid.*, i, 202). Yet fortune does not figure prominently in the History, Boece apparently preferring to attribute the fall of tyrants to 'the justice of God' and 'divine punitioun' (*ibid.*, ii, 108-9, 122). None of these examples can be considered conclusive, however, and the conclusions I have reached regarding Boece's intentions in describing the depositions are based as much on my interpretation of other aspects of the History as on what can be learned (if anything) from such sketchy remarks as those above.

learned from this was not constitutional, but moral : that is to say, Boece did not recommend that the prince's power should be limited, but simply admonished kings to live virtuous lives.

Construed in this way, Boece's apparent constitutionalism resolves itself rather into an exploration of the implications of a traditional ethical conception of kingship. In common with almost every writer we have considered, he believed that the welfare and integrity of the realm depended upon the moral proclivities - the manners - of the prince himself. In essence, this meant for Boece that kings had to emulate and enforce the austere discipline characteristic of their ancient forbears. Consequently, the History is structured in terms of the constant endeavour of Scotland's virtuous kings to restore the temperate manners which vicious tyrants have allowed to lapse. Perhaps not insignificantly, even the law was harnessed to this ethical frame of reference : for far from seeing it as a means either of limiting royal power or of defining the rights of the people, Boece saw it primarily as a means of maintaining the ancient discipline. For example, when Constantine II succeeded the tyrant Donald IV, he immediately passed laws forbidding drunkenness, exiling those who provoked the people 'to intemperat diet and lustis', encouraging the martial arts, and reinstituting the salutary practice of sleeping 'on burdis, and hard beddis, to mak thaim [his subjects] abill to suffir distres in the kingis weris'. 'Be thir lawis', declared Boece approvingly:

the pepill wer maid within schort time, of  
licherous gluttonis, temperate men; of soft  
bodyis, reddy to suffir laubouris; and of  
effeminat creatouris, made wise and manly  
campionis. Followit, sone eftir, gret



felicitate to the realm, throw wise and prudent  
administratioun of King Constantine.<sup>1</sup>

For Boece, the law was clearly a means, not of defining rights and obligations, but of promoting the manners and discipline - the virtue - exemplified by the ancient Scots. However, although he wrote quite freely of kings framing laws, legislation per se was in fact of negligible importance to Boece's overall conception of the polity. Not unexpectedly, as a way of releasing and regulating virtue, the law was much less significant than the example of the prince himself. Without a king prepared to live in strict accordance with the temperate manners of the elders, no law could hope to prevent the physical degeneration and moral anarchy brought on by the debilitating influence of luxury and self-indulgence. Consequently, for a prince to renounce virtue, to abandon the temperate manners of his ancestors, was not simply to court the ignominious fate which justly awaited all wicked tyrants, but also - and much worse - to jeopardize the commonweal and liberty of the realm. After all, as the History amply demonstrated, virtue alone rendered the prince impervious to the temptations of the flesh and insensitive to the subtle wiles of sycophantic courtiers; virtue alone ensured that he remained heedful of the wisdom of his noble counsellors and capable of administering justice impartially to rich and poor alike; and virtue alone guaranteed that both prince and people possessed the strength of mind and body necessary to maintain the freedom of the realm. Without virtue, indeed, the Scottish polity was as vulnerable to internal abuse and misgovernance as it was to external invasion and defeat. Consequently,

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1. Ibid., ii, 173-4.

given the powerful political dynamic inherent in the manners of the prince, it was crucial that he be warned of the grave implications of any deviation from the narrow paths of virtue.

In the final analysis, then, Boece clearly viewed Scotland as a polity of manners whose governance as well as its identity were ultimately dependent on the virtues of its prince and people. Despite many classical, neo-Stoic overtones, however, it was virtue conceived, not in terms of the cerebral aspirations of the humanist social ethic, but in terms of the heroic qualities of the chivalric code. The manners of the ancient Scots, for example, were those of a society where education and polite learning were firmly subordinated to hunting and the martial arts as a means of promoting virtue.<sup>1</sup> They were, in brief, the manners of chivalric knights rather than of gentlemen-governors. Although equally applicable to the monarchy, this is most clearly revealed in Boece's attitude to the nobility. The latter, of course, were not only the king's natural counsellors whose advice was always to be preferred to that of low-born favourites, but were also the group to which Boece looked to admonish and restrain a tyrannical ruler. Yet it was, in fact, for neither of these reasons that Boece felt bound to declare 'that nobil men ar als necessar to kingis as ony landis or riches'. On the contrary, this complimentary remark was actually prompted by the nobility's valorous conduct in delivering the realm 'out of Inglismennis handis' during the reign of David II.<sup>2</sup> It was with the martial prowess of the

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1. On the 'honorabill game of hunting' ordained for 'nobillis and gentill men', see for example *ibid.*, i, 38-9, 71, 186-7.

2. *Ibid.*, ii, 436.



nobility, their skill and courage as warriors, that Boece was chiefly concerned and, throughout the History, the accent is quite palpably placed on the deeds of high chivalry performed by Scottish knights and warriors. Thus Bellenden exhorted his translation in the following characteristic terms:

Schaw how young knichtis suld be men of weir,  
With hardy sprete at everie jeopordie,  
Like as thair eldaris bene sa mony yeir,  
Ay to defend thair realme and liberte;  
That thay not, be thair sleuth and cowartre,  
The fame and honour of thair eldaris tine  
[= lose].<sup>1</sup>

As this suggests, however, like the medieval chroniclers and poets before him, Boece deliberately harnessed the militarism of the chivalric code to the patriotic ideology which pervades his work. If the History is replete with examples of courage and loyalty, these are qualities best displayed by warriors fighting in defence of Scottish freedom. They were qualities, moreover, which Boece believed his contemporaries ought to emulate and which his History was designed to promote. There is perhaps, therefore, more than a little self-gratulation in his commendation of King Eugenius VII for ordering 'all the mercial dedis of his antecessouris to be put in cronikillis, to raise the knichtly curage of his posterite in desire of honouris and laude'. Likewise, there was probably no little self-interest in his further comment that Eugenius had arranged for 'expert historicians' to be sustained 'on the common purse'.<sup>2</sup> In the light of this, it is gratifying to know that, although the History was reputedly

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1. Ibid., i, cxi.

2. Ibid., ii, 116.

first published at its author's own expense, both Boece and Bellenden did nevertheless receive royal pensions.<sup>1</sup>

### III

It should by now be clear that, for all its oddities and idiosyncrasies, Boece's Scotorum Historiae in fact exemplifies a highly conventional, if characteristically Scottish, view of the political world. At its heart, for example, lie two basic preoccupations - with the freedom of the realm and with the equitable administration of justice within it - which we know to have dominated the outlook and aspirations of the Scottish political community throughout the fifteenth century. Boece, in other words, merely historicized and explored modes of thought relating to the status and governance of the kingdom which were already generally current among and habitually employed by his Scottish contemporaries. Not surprisingly, therefore, he also made the virtually paradigmatic connection between the maintenance of freedom and justice and the exercise of virtuous kingship. That is, like so many of his countrymen, he assumed that the survival and stability - or, in sixteenth century parlance, the commonweal and liberty - of the realm depended upon the personal moral bearing of the prince himself. Such an ideal of kingship, defined largely in ethical terms and stressing the monarchy's function as both the symbol of the freedom of the realm and the source of justice within it, is central not only to Boece's History, but to almost all the literature we have discussed thus far. Its prevalence, indeed, goes a long

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1. See Simpson, 'Hector Boece', 9.



way towards explaining why the legend of James III - his alleged corruption and rapid descent into tyranny and injustice - took the particular form it did. Regardless of factual accuracy, the events of his unfortunate reign were made to conform to a preconceived pattern which was widely accepted as paradigmatic of the breakdown of the ideal political order. In the light of the evidence gathered here and in the previous chapters, we can say with a considerable degree of certainty that it was the matrix of ideas outlined above - perhaps best characterized as an ideology of patriotic conservatism - which constituted the basic conceptual framework for the majority of politically conscious Scots in the early sixteenth century. Indeed, as we shall see, embodied and articulated in what we have already termed the language of the commonweal, it was precisely these ideas which continued to dominate Scottish political thought throughout the Reformation period.

The implications of this important, but neglected fact as regards the crises of the late 1550's and 1560's will be analysed in some detail in Part III of this study. Meanwhile, in Part II, it is necessary to examine the development and impact of a rather different ideology which, particularly in the 1540's, offered a serious challenge to some of the most fundamental assumptions implicit in the modes of thought explored in the previous three chapters. This alternative ideology was founded on the possibility of a dynastic union between Scotland and England and the creation of a single 'British' realm out of the hitherto distinct kingdoms. The idea of union was by no means a new one, but in the 1540's it was lent much greater urgency by conflicting religious allegiances brought about by Henry VIII's break with Rome and the subsequent spread of Protestantism

among many of his most influential subjects. In English eyes, it was now imperative that something be done to neutralize the Catholic outpost on the country's northern frontier. As a result, the cause of union was preached with fanatical vigour, not only by English propagandists, but also by those Scots whose Protestant sympathies led them to welcome the prospect of an alliance with an England newly-purged of Catholic influence. As we shall see, however, central to the unionist ideology developed under these circumstances was an apocalyptic vision of a Protestant and imperial British realm whose legitimation involved a sweeping denial of Scottish autonomy and a concomitant negation of the traditional beliefs and values which underwrote the dominant ideology of patriotic conservatism. Not surprisingly, the prospect of union on such terms met with a largely negative reaction from the Scots. Nevertheless, the arguments deployed in its support are of considerable importance here both because of their future influence and because the Scottish response to them provides many additional insights into the 'thought-world' of the political community on the eve of the Reformation. Before we discuss these developments in detail, however, it is as well to examine the political thought of an earlier advocate of union who, albeit from a quite different perspective, was similarly critical of many of the Scots' most treasured preconceptions. That man was, of course, none other than the scholastic theologian, John Mair.



## Part II

### EMPIRE AND APOCALYPSE

## Chapter Four

Mair, the Polity and the Benefits of Union

Although the patriotic conservatism exemplified by Hector Boece undoubtedly dominated Scottish political thought in the early sixteenth century, this was certainly not the only view of the Scottish political world available at that time. In 1521, for example, six years before the appearance of the Scotorum Historiae, there was published (also in Paris) John Mair's Historia Majoris Britanniae tam Angliae quam Scotiae, a work which expressed a radically different conception of Scotland's history and governance.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, although Boece was never less than complimentary towards Mair, calling him 'a profound theologian, whose writings, like brightest torches, have shed a glorious light on the Christian religion',<sup>2</sup> his chronicle could nevertheless be construed as a patriotic rejoinder to Mair's unsympathetic critique of many of the modes of thought discussed in the three foregoing chapters. For not only was Mair somewhat critical of the chivalric mores of the Scottish nobility, but he was also extremely sceptical of the Scots' legendary origins and a vigorous opponent of the belligerent patriotism of the medieval Scottish chroniclers. As

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1. John Mair, A History of Greater Britain ... 1521, ed. and trans. Archibald Constable (S.H.S., 1892). All subsequent references are to this edition.

2. Hectoris Boetii Murthlacensium et Aberdonensium Episcoporum Vitae, ed. and trans. James Moir (New Spalding Club, 1894), 89. In his chronicle, Boece mentions Mair's History only in connection with the latter's comments on David I's profligate attitude to ecclesiastical foundations and makes no reference to it as a possible source for his own work; see The History and Chronicles of Scotland : written in Latin by Hector Boece ... and translated by John Bellenden ..., ed. Thomas Maitland (Edinburgh, 1821), ii, 300.



we shall see, Mair was not himself unpatriotic, but his patriotism was of an unconventional kind and, unlike Boece's, less immediately congenial to Anglophobic Scots reared on works such as Blind Hary's 'native rhymes'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, as the title of his work suggests, Mair saw the best future for Scotland as lying in a close alliance with England and his aim therefore was to promote the idea of union among the 'British' peoples. This was an alternative which was to figure prominently in the political debates of the sixteenth century and not least at the time of the Reformation itself. Consequently, as the earliest extended apologia for a nascent unionist ideology, Mair's History deserves serious attention.

Mair himself was born around 1467 and spent most of his early and middle years as a student and teacher at the University of Paris before returning to Scotland in 1518 to teach initially at the University of Glasgow and subsequently at St. Andrews.<sup>2</sup> When his History was published in 1521, he was already considered one of the most illustrious Parisian theologians and, although later traduced by humanists who disliked his 'Sorbonnic Latin', his influence both in

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1. Mair's comments on Hary's Wallace are not without interest :  
'There was one Henry, blind from his birth, who, in the time of my childhood [Mair was born c.1467, Hary's Wallace composed 1476-8], fabricated a whole book about William Wallace, and therein he wrote down in our native rhymes - and this was a kind of composition in which he had much skill - all that passed current among the people in his day. I however can give but a partial credence to such writings as these' (Mair, History, 205).
  2. He was not, however, continuously resident in Scotland after 1518, returning to Paris, for example, between 1526 and 1531. For details of his career, see the 'Life of the Author' by A. J. G. Mackay prefaced to the S. H. S. edition of the History and the important modifications to this account in J. H. Burns, 'New Light on John Major', Innes Review, V (1954), 83-100. See also John Durkan, 'John Major : After 400 Years', Innes Review, I (1950), 131-9.

Scotland and on the continent was nevertheless widespread. As a thoroughly Gallicized Scot with some experience of English life, he was perhaps better qualified than most to write a History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Yet it should be pointed out at once that, despite this title, Mair did not write a 'British' history in the sense of one that sought to combine Scottish and English experience in a single, unified perspective. On the contrary, he merely wrote two chronicles in harness whose real novelty lies in the author's willingness to criticize the received versions of the histories of both kingdoms and in the forthright manner in which he advocated the cause of union between them. In fact, for the most part, the History is little more than a vehicle for the preconceived ideas of an erudite, but opinionated theologian - a theologian concerned, moreover, that his readers should learn 'not only the thing that was done, but also how it ought to have been done'.<sup>2</sup> Often, indeed, the histories Mair recounted failed to engage his interest and, lacking Boece's narrative power, he was reduced to the role of annalist. On other occasions, however, the material provided ample scope for the airing of his views and the theologian was quick to exploit the opportunity with full scholastic rigour. In particular, three preoccupations emerge from the pages of the History which merit detailed analysis : firstly, Mair's critique of the legendary origins of both Scotland and England; secondly, his analysis of the deficiencies of

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1. Mair spent a year as a student at Cambridge in the early 1490's and his several journeys between Scotland and France will have further familiarized him with England. See Burns, 'New Light on Major', 85-6, 90.

2. Mair, History, cxxxiv-cxxxv.



the Scottish polity; and thirdly, his belief in the accountability of kings to their subjects. In what follows, we will deal with each of these in turn.

# I

The opening chapter of the History is concerned with the original settlement of the British Isles and in it Mair set the tone for what was to follow by immediately attacking the foundation legend which we have already associated with Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Brut tradition and which had recently found its way into print for the first time in William Caxton's Chronicles of England published in 1480. It is a very short opening chapter, for Mair dismissed out of hand Caxton's 'visionary account' of the settlement of the whole island in 1170 B.C. by the Trojan Brutus and, thereafter, putting his faith in 'the Venerable Bede, among British historians chief', entirely ignored the millennium or so of 'British' history which was believed to pre-date the arrival of the Romans.<sup>1</sup> Caxton remained a favourite target for Mair throughout the History, largely on account of the former's persistent claim that Scottish kings had done homage for their kingdom to English superiors. Already, however, Mair's scepticism had gone far towards undermining the English imperialist ideology which previous Scottish chroniclers had sought so assiduously to counter. For, if Brutus was a figment of the collective imagination of the English chroniclers, then so too was his son Albanactus and so too all the consequences in terms of Scotland's dependency which Monmouth and his

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1. Ibid., 1-4.

followers had seen fit to assume. Mair did not spell out these implications, but he was certainly aware of them and, in order to confirm the original and continuing independence of the Scots, he returned to Brutus and his sons at a later stage in the History. On this occasion, however, he sought to establish his point by a slightly different argument, contending that, even if Brutus and his progeny had existed, the ever-reliable Bede as well as the similarity of language made it quite clear that the Scots were descendants of the Irish who, in turn, originated in Spain and had no recorded connection with either Brutus or Albanactus.<sup>1</sup> As far as Mair was concerned, therefore, there was no reason whatsoever to credit the English account of the Scots' descent or to accept the inferior status attributed to Scotland on that basis.

Equally, however, there was no reason to credit the Scots' counter-assertion that they were descendants of the Greek Prince Gathelus and his wife, Scota, the daughter of Pharaoh. If, having denied English pretensions, Mair's Scottish readers expected him to parade their own superior genealogy, they were sorely disappointed and quickly disabused. Instead, they were edified by a perceptive summary of how the rival legends had come into existence, prefaced by a frank dismissal of their own heroic ancestors' alleged origins:

As to this original departure of theirs out of Greece and Egypt, I count it a fable, and for this reason: their English enemies had learned to boast of an origin from the Trojans, so the Scots claimed an original descent from the Greeks who had subdued the Trojans, and then bettered it with this about the illustrious kingdom of Egypt. But seeing that all

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1. Ibid., 50-1.



history and the similarity of language went to prove that the Irish sprang from people of Spain, they added yet this: that the Greeks and the Egyptians, from whom they claimed a still further and original descent, spent two hundred years in western Hesperia. From all this it seems that some true statements are mixed up with statements that are doubtful. For it is certain that the Irish are descended from the Spaniards and the Scottish Britons from the Irish - all the rest I dismiss as doubtful, and to me, indeed, unprofitable.<sup>1</sup>

Few such judicious comments on the ideological biases of medieval historiography were to emerge in the sixteenth century. Plainly, Mair was no more enamoured of the patriotic legends of the Scots than he was of those of the English. He proceeds, moreover, to confirm this impression by ignoring the early history of Scotland in much the same way as he had ignored that of England. While prepared to admit the foundation of the kingdom by Fergus I in 330 B.C., he pointed out that both Picts and Britons were already there and - in complete contrast to Boece - made no attempt to fill the gap between then and the incursions of the Romans.<sup>2</sup> He said only (and somewhat enigmatically) that, between Fergus I and the refoundation of the kingdom by Fergus II in 403 A.D., 'we reckon fifteen kings of the Scots, whose reigns cover a space of seven hundred years, as you can gather from history'.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., 51-2.

2. Ibid., 54-7. Moreover, to accommodate the authority of Bede, Mair claimed 'it was but a feeble foundation of the kingdom that Fergus laid, and it was the son of his great-grandson, Rether, as our chronicles call him, or Reuda - to speak with Bede - who confirmed the first foundation, and added to his kingdom both what he won from the Picts and somewhat too from the Britons' (ibid., 56).

3. Ibid., 64. Mair does, however, deal briefly with the Scots' determination not to submit to Roman tutelage and their temporary expulsion from their kingdom by an alliance of Picts and Romans (ibid., 59, 61-3). The reduction of the early kings from Fordun's forty-five to a mere fifteen occurs without explanation.

Precisely which 'history' Mair is here referring to remains unclear.

Assuredly, however, he did not have access to Boece's *Veremundus*.

On the face of it, therefore, T. D. Kendrick was quite right when he wrote that Mair's History 'has a brilliant, sensible, and honourable beginning, sweeping aside, as it does, with the sound sense of the cosmopolitan Renaissance scholar most of the medieval fables that were making the early history of England and Scotland ridiculous'.<sup>1</sup> But few Renaissance scholars pursued their research from wholly disinterested motives and Mair was no exception. However 'brilliant, sensible, and honourable' he may appear, Mair nevertheless had an axe to grind and the patriotic myths would most certainly have dulled rather than sharpened it. Just as he was aware of the ideological purposes served by the rival historiographical traditions, so he was quite consciously propagating a different ideology which he hoped would supersede and render them redundant. Acutely conscious of the instability generated by the traditionally rancorous relationship between Scotland and England, he wished to lessen those tensions by demolishing the rival histories that legitimated the conflict and ultimately to overcome them by uniting the two kingdoms in a single 'British' realm.

Consequently, at the very beginning of the History, Mair sought to eliminate even the difference in name between Scots and English by arguing that because of their location in the same geographical land-mass - Greater as opposed to Lesser Britain (Brittany) - they were all also Britons. Either, he asserted, the original inhabitants of the island - now living in Wales - are the only Britons, or else all the

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1. T. D. Kendrick, British Antiquity (London, 1950), 79.



people now inhabiting the island are Britons. As the former interpretation, he continued, is 'against all common use of language', it is the latter - 'that all men born in Britain are Britons' - that is more sensible and acceptable.<sup>1</sup> Despite, therefore, but primarily because of the long and debilitating rivalry between Scots and English, Mair urged the adoption of a 'neutral' descriptive nomenclature which would both transcend ancient political differences and render them in future linguistically inconceivable. As he himself implied, the use of such 'British' terminology was by no means unprecedented, but neither was it necessarily altogether neutral. For in the middle ages the terms 'Britain' and 'Greater Britain' had not only been used to describe both England and the whole island, but they had also, and more importantly, been consistently construed as deriving from Brutus, the eponymous founder of the 'British' kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Now, as we have already seen, if Mair was prepared to ignore the implications for Scotland of such an etymology, other Scottish chroniclers were not. Fordun, for example, followed closely by Boece, had been all too conscious of the terminology's easy association with Galfridian imperialism and had insisted in no uncertain terms that the correct name for the whole island was Albion, while Britain referred only to that part of it - now known as England - where Brutus had actually ruled. In other words, both Fordun and Boece were well aware of the threat to Scottish autonomy implicit in what the former was forced nevertheless to concede was 'the common opinion of modern

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1. Mair, History, 17-8.

2. On these points, see Denys Hay, 'The use of the term "Great Britain" in the Middle Ages', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, LXXXIX (1955-6), 55-66.

time ... that the whole of Albion was called Britannia, from Brutus, who only colonized its southern regions'.<sup>1</sup> Mair, however, perhaps relying on his demolition of the Brutus myth itself, was prepared to ignore these patriotic cavils. As far as he was concerned, 'Britain' and 'Briton' were clearly the ideal linguistic tools for transcending the political and cultural barriers between Scots and English.

Mair did realize, however, that the new terminology was unlikely to supersede the more common forms so long as Scotland and England remained separate kingdoms. Consequently, to further his end, and also to guarantee its permanence, he repeatedly stressed the necessity of a union of the crowns which would merge the ancient realms of Scotland and England and create a new kingdom of Britain:

... to God, the Ruler of all, I pray, that He may grant such a peace to the Britons [i.e., both Scots and English], that one of its kings in a union of marriage may by just title gain both kingdoms - for any other way of reaching an assured peace I hardly see. I dare to say that Englishman and Scot alike have small regard for their monarchs if they do not continually aim at intermarriages, that so one kingdom of Britain may be formed out of the two that now exist.<sup>2</sup>

It was imperative, however, that such a union be consummated 'by just title': as history demonstrated, English attempts at conquest, backed by their 'British' (i.e., Galfridian) imperial ideology, had achieved nothing more than military stalemate and steadily worsening relations.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See Johannis de Fordun, Chronica Gentis Scotorum, ed. W. F. Skene and trans. F. J. H. Skene (Edinburgh, 1871-2), ii, 5, 30-4; cf. Bellenden, History, i, xix, xxii.
  2. Mair, History, 41-2 (emphasis added).
  3. On the evil effects of war between the two kingdoms, see for example *ibid.*, 41, 218.



The only guarantee of a peaceful and undisputed union 'under the rule of one monarch, who should be called king of Britain' was through marriages - like that of James IV to Margaret Tudor - which would unite the dynasties and provide in time a monarch 'possessed of a just and honest title' to both kingdoms.<sup>1</sup> Only thus, thought Mair, could a British realm be realized without bloodshed and the terms Scotland and England - for so long the foci of division and acrimony - be rendered finally redundant.

It is this strong commitment to peaceful dynastic union which explains Mair's intense dislike for the Galfridian version of British history enshrined in Caxton's chronicle. After all, such a union would have to be of equals, of independent kingdoms voluntarily recognizing the liquidation of their separate sovereign status and the simultaneous creation of a new all-encompassing sovereignty. The tradition of English historiography publicized by Caxton, however, denied Scotland's independent sovereignty altogether, not only through its repetition of the Brutus legend, but also through its assertion that Scottish monarchs had habitually done homage for their kingdom to the English crown. Mair sought stoutly and strenuously to deny these claims. Like previous Scottish chroniclers, not only was he sceptical of Brutus and the later Arthurian empire,<sup>2</sup> but he hotly denied that

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1. Ibid., 217-8.

2. Mair was, oddly enough, rather less sceptical than most Scots when dealing with Arthur and rehearsed the story of his conquest of the whole of Britain, attributing it to Geoffrey of Monmouth. However, he concluded: 'The extraordinary laudation of Arthur by the Britons leads to a partial doubt of the facts of his life. The prayers that were made to him from a bed of sickness, and many other things that are related concerning Arthur and Valvanus, in respect to events that are said to have come to pass in Britain at that time - all these I count as fiction, unless indeed they were brought about by crafts of demons' (ibid., 81-5).

Scottish kings made submission to English superiors for anything other than the lands they held in England. Caxton, he asserted, spoke 'in language that held as many lies as it did words' when he claimed that 'from the days of Brutus the Scots had been vassals, and that Albanactus, the first king of the Scots, was son to Brutus'. If he might be excused as an 'unlettered man' simply following 'the fashion of speech that was common amongst the English about their enemies the Scots', he nevertheless had only to read his countryman Bede to discover that the Scots were 'at no time subject to the Britons'.<sup>1</sup> Nor, after the time of Bede, was there any greater justification for such assertions of superiority. Caxton's 'silly fabrications' regarding John Balliol and the Scots' submission to Edward I, for example, were not just full of 'improbabilities' but were 'a mass of incoherencies as well'.<sup>2</sup> Nor, indeed, was it just history that refuted these claims : they were equally untenable in terms of political theory. For even if it could be proved that historically a Scottish king did do homage for his kingdom, Mair contended that such a submission would be patently invalid 'because a free king has no power at his own arbitrary pleasure to make his people subject to another'.<sup>3</sup> Sovereignty, in other words, could not be transferred or alienated at the whim of the monarch : it was a public, not a private possession and the holder had it by consent of those he governed. This is an important argument to which we will return in a different context. It is

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1. Ibid., 287.

2. Ibid., 194. Mair similarly denied Caxton's assertions that Malcolm Canmore rendered homage for the kingdom to William the Conqueror and that David I did likewise to Henry I (ibid., 127-8, 143-4).

3. Ibid., 287.



sufficient here to note that, as far as Mair was concerned, English claims to superiority were demonstrably chimerical. Their imperial pretensions, pursued by force and legitimately resisted by force, had no justification in either history or political theory.

## II

Clearly, then, Mair was intent on nullifying the traditional antipathy between Scots and English as expressed and legitimated in the rival historiographical traditions and on uniting the two peoples under the common name of Britons. Both would abandon their spurious and divisive foundation legends, while the English would renounce their specious claim to superiority and the imperial dreams based thereon. The only means of guaranteeing such an outcome, however, was through intermarriage and an eventual union of the crowns. Consequently, Mair rebuked the Scots for marrying, for example, Alexander III's heiress into the Norwegian instead of the English royal house:

For thus, and thus only, could two intensely hostile peoples, inhabitants of the same island, of which neither can conquer the other, have been brought together under one and the same king. And what although the name and kingdom of the Scots had disappeared - so too would the name and kingdom of the English no more have had a place among men - for in the place of both we should have a king of Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Mair would seem, therefore, wholly committed to a policy of complete union such as was later envisaged by James VI and I. Just as the terms Scots and English, with all their connotations of mutual

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1. Ibid., 189.

hostility, would be replaced by the unifying label Briton, so too the kingdoms themselves would be joined and subsumed in a new British realm. But Mair was not quite as unequivocal in his vision of the new Britain, nor quite as consistent in his use of British terminology, as this might suggest. For, in the sentences immediately following the above quotation, he went on to remark that:

Nor would the Scots have aught to fear from taxes imposed by an English king. For the English king I dare to make answer, that he would have respected our ancient liberties, just as the king of Castile [i.e., Ferdinand of Aragon] at the present day permits to the men of Aragon the full enjoyment of their rights.<sup>1</sup>

Not only does Mair seem here to forget that, under the new dispensation, Scots and English would no longer exist and that their king would be the king of Britain, but he also endorses a view of empire which, guaranteeing particularist privilege, is inimical to the wholly unified and uniform realm which he elsewhere appears to advocate. Already, in fact, Mair is revealing the pitfalls of his British vocabulary as well as hinting at the enormous practical difficulties involved in unifying two similar but by no means identical social and political communities. It is worth noting in passing, moreover, that such problems have never been entirely eradicated and remain with us to this day.

Yet one reason for Mair's own equivocation - as well as a primary reason for his advocacy of some form of union - is perhaps revealed in the remainder of this same paragraph. For Mair goes on to argue that

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1. Ibid., 189-90.



the nobility of England, but more particularly of Scotland, are opposed 'to the notion of the rule of a single king throughout the length and breadth of the island' simply because 'the outstanding men among them would not then dare to make face against the king when his power had grown to such a height'.<sup>1</sup> Mair probably thought it inadvisable to threaten the local privileges and power of the Scottish nobility so overtly that they would condemn out of hand any form of union. Instead, he chose to dwell on the pleasing prospect which union - 'pregnant with advantage' - would have opened up to them had they seized their opportunities in the past:

They would have known what it is to have an equal administration of justice; no man would have been able to lay violent hands on his neighbour; their houses and families would have been secured of an undisturbed existence; never would they have known invasion from a foreign king; and if at any time they had to avenge an injury, there would have been no foe within their borders to temper with a sense of insecurity the justice of their quarrel.<sup>2</sup>

Union, in other words, would result in peace and justice, a stable polity ruled by a strong monarchy. As the History in general makes clear, this was a dispensation which, although benefitting both peoples, Mair thought particularly relevant to the less sophisticated Scots. Indeed, he evidently believed union to be essential for Scotland, not simply on the grounds that it would eliminate the external tensions generated by ceaseless Anglo-Scottish hostility, but also on the grounds that it would alleviate the serious tensions apparent within the Scottish polity. Union, therefore, far from being unpatriotic, was for Mair the most patriotic policy a Scotsman could adopt.

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1. Ibid., 190.

2. Ibid., 190.

He clearly, if paradoxically, believed it was the surest - indeed, the only - means by which the security and well-being of his countrymen could be safeguarded and promoted.

But in what respects was the Scottish polity so deficient that the only remedy lay in union? One problem to which Mair returned on several occasions was that of the Highlands and the linguistic and cultural division between what he termed 'wild' Scots and their 'householding', 'domestic' or 'civilized' brethren. On one occasion, for example, he wrote:

just as among the Scots we find two distinct tongues, so we likewise find two different ways of life and conduct. For some are born in the forests and mountains of the north, and these we call men of the Highland, but the others men of the Lowland. By foreigners the former are called Wild Scots, the latter householding Scots. The Irish tongue is in use among the former, the English among the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Boece, however, Mair had no desire to see 'effete' Lowlanders emulating the manners of their 'virtuous' Highland countrymen. On the contrary, he believed that, 'in the manner of their outward life, and in good morals', the Highlanders came far 'behind the householding Scots' of the Lowlands. Indeed, for the most part, Mair thought the Highlanders an extremely unpleasant people : indolent, combative, undisciplined and as suspicious of the 'quiet and civil-living people' of the Lowlands as they were of the English.<sup>2</sup> Certainly there were

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1. Ibid., 48 (cf. *ibid.*, 18). Much the same distinction between 'wild' and 'householding' Scots is to be found in Chron. Fordun, ii, 38.

2. Mair, History, 49-50.



some among them who, possessing a little wealth in the form of livestock, yielded 'more willing obedience to the courts of law and the king'.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, however, they were a lawless and predatory people who rarely acknowledged the crown's authority. Scottish kings, indeed, far from imposing their wills on the Highlands, had in the past barely withstood the Highlanders' forays into the Lowlands. In Mair's view, James I was a partial exception to this rule and he singled him out for special praise after describing his efforts to subdue those chieftains who 'were regarded as princes, and had all at their own arbitrary will, evincing not the smallest regard for the dictates of reason'.<sup>2</sup> But no other king had emulated James I's achievement with any success and the problem of the Highlands remained still unresolved.

The problem of law and order in Scotland was not, however, confined to the Highlands. In Mair's opinion at least, even in the more 'civilized' Lowlands, Scottish government left a great deal to be desired. As he rather scathingly put it, it 'is ... with the householding Scots that the government and direction of the kingdom is to be found, inasmuch as they understand better, or at least less ill than the others, the nature of a civil polity'.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, the stability of that polity depended on the relationship and balance of power between the crown and the nobility and it is to just this question that Mair frequently returned. We have already seen, for example, that he believed the nobility to be opposed to the idea of union

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1. Ibid., 49.

2. Ibid., 358.

3. Ibid., 49.

because they feared the king would then be so powerful as to make opposition to his will impossible. He is never again in the History quite as explicit as in that passage, but related places clearly imply that it was for precisely this reason that Mair advocated the cause of union with such vigour.<sup>1</sup> For, as far as he was concerned, the Scottish nobility were too powerful and the only means of permanently redressing the balance in favour of the crown was through union. Only then, with the combined resources of the two kingdoms at their disposal, would British kings be able to pacify once and for all the unruly Scottish nobles.

Mair's attitude to the nobility is made plain on a number of occasions in the History. In a previous chapter, for example, we have already noted his trenchant, albeit playful, critique of the whole concept of an hereditary aristocracy and heard his plea to the nobility to educate their children, not just in the martial arts, but also in 'polite learning'.<sup>2</sup> Ignorance, however, was but the second of two related faults which Mair discerned in the contemporary aristocracy. The first was their predilection for long and bloody feuds: 'If two nobles of equal rank', he wrote, 'happen to be very near neighbours, quarrels and even shedding of blood are a common thing between them;

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1. On one occasion, for example, Mair referred to 'certain powerful Englishmen and Scots' who, because they 'themselves aspire to the sovereignty', were opposed to a union which would create above them 'a king more firmly placed upon his throne' (ibid., 218-9).

2. See above, pp.46-8. On the same theme, Mair was also critical of the 'dangerous game of jousting with the spear merely for the sake of making a show' and advised restricting such activities to necessary practice for war and then only 'with blunted spear' (History, 282).



and their very retainers cannot meet without strife ...'<sup>1</sup> As this suggests, Mair was concerned above all to prevent the escalation of feuds through the involvement of the principals' vassals and dependants. As he commented elsewhere in the History, it would be 'better for the king and commonweal that the vassal should not so rise at the mere nod of his superior' and one way of lessening the ties of dependency would be to lengthen the leases by which they held their land, thus giving them much greater security and independence.<sup>2</sup> As it was, only a strong king could hope to hold warring factions in check: a king, in Mair's view, such as James I who not only (as we have seen) 'tamed the Wild Scots, even the fiercest of them, and led them to a gentler way of life', but also exercised his authority in the Lowlands to such effect that there 'was no noble who dared to raise his sword against another; to his orders, written or spoken, every man alike yielded obedience'.<sup>3</sup> Once again, however, James I must be considered an exceptional monarch for, according to Mair, few others were as successful as he in commanding the obedience of the fractious Scottish magnates.

Mair's fear of over-mighty subjects is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his discussion of the threat posed to the realm by the fifteenth century house of Douglas.<sup>4</sup> 'For Scotland, as I see, the earl of Douglas was too powerful', he opined; 'he had thirty or forty

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1. Ibid., 48.

2. Ibid., 30-1.

3. Ibid., 367.

4. For this discussion, from which the following quotations are drawn, see *ibid.*, 383-4.

thousand fighting men ever ready to answer his call'. Nor, apparently, was this an exceptional number of followers, for Mair later remarked that English and Scottish earls, although much less wealthy than the dukes of France, could still bring to the field just as many warriors, 'for the Britons are so kindly affected to their lords that thirty or forty thousand men will follow these at their own charges'. In Scotland, therefore, some great magnates could muster an army as large as any at the disposal of the crown and threaten not only the king himself but also the welfare of the realm he governed. For Mair this was a quite intolerable situation and, not surprisingly, he advised his countrymen 'that there is naught more perilous than unduly to exalt great houses', particularly (as in the case of the Douglasses) 'if their territory happen to lie in the extremities of the kingdom, and the men themselves are high-spirited'. Consequently, he went on to criticize the policy of creating powerful marcher lordships which, designed for the better defence of the realm, could just as easily contribute to its destruction:

Now when the captains of the marches are not so powerful, the smaller nobility will not follow them, nor by consequence the common people; and though one very powerful lord may be better able to withstand an enemy than one of the smaller nobles will do, yet will that greater power of resistance turn in the end to the ruin of their families, while it is profitless to the state. For powerful nobles do not fear to engage in war on their own authority, and a number of lords, when they get the common people to join them, are strong enough, when they think fit to do so, to make stand against the king.

In a sense, therefore, Mair takes his place as the first in a long line of historians to interpret the fifteenth century in terms of a continuous struggle on the part of the crown to impose its will on over-mighty and ambitious magnates. This is an interpretation, however, which has



recently come under considerable fire for doing less than justice to a nobility who, as their effective government of the localities makes clear, were neither as irresponsible nor as feckless as they are often said to have been.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, at the centre of power, frequent and lengthy minorities did certainly accentuate the traditionally boisterous and occasionally bloody nature of magnatial politics and made it all the more difficult - although by no means impossible - for adult monarchs to achieve the degree of control and cooperation necessary for efficient royal government. In this respect, there is no doubt that Mair's sympathies lay entirely with the monarchy and that, however unjust his overall assessment of the nobility, he viewed a stronger and more effective kingship as essential to the well-being and stability of the polity. Nor, finally, does it seem unreasonable to suppose that he saw a union of the British realms as the most sensible means of strengthening royal power to such an extent that the nobility would never again be capable of challenging it by force.

To sum up the argument so far, it is clear that Mair saw internal instability caused by lawless Highlanders and over-mighty Lowland

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1. The traditional view of the nobility is perhaps best conveyed by Thomas Carlyle's terrifying description of them as 'a selfish, ferocious, unprincipled set of hyenas' (quoted in I. F. Grant, The Social and Economic Development of Scotland before 1603 [Edinburgh, 1930], 197). In recent years, however, this orthodoxy has been seriously undermined by the pioneering researches of Jennifer M. Brown (Jenny Wormald). Among the most important of her published writings on this theme are: 'Taming the Magnates?', in The Scottish Nation, ed. Gordon Menzies (London, 1972), 46-59; 'The Exercise of Power', in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London, 1977), 33-65; 'Bloodfeud, Kindred and Government in Early Modern Scotland', Past and Present, LXXXVII (1980), 54-97; and Court, Kirk and Community : Scotland 1470-1625 (London, 1981), esp. Chs. 1-2.

magnates, allied to and exacerbated by external pressures arising from continuous Anglo-Scottish hostility, as the principal tensions threatening the welfare of the Scottish polity. They were tensions, however, which he believed could be eased immediately and simultaneously by a union of the Scottish and English crowns. For not only would his proposed British monarchy undermine and eradicate the justification for warfare among the British peoples, but it would also be strong enough to impose order on both elements of Scotland's divided political culture. In the 1520's, during a period of minority government dominated by feuding magnatial families, such arguments may not have appeared wholly fanciful to the Scots. Nevertheless, Mair's views were clearly quite different from - indeed, in many respects, they directly challenged - the much more conventional and deep-rooted convictions and prejudices articulated in works such as Boece's Scotorum Historiae.<sup>1</sup> Even leaving aside Mair's turgid academic prose, therefore, it is not surprising that his History never attracted the same kind of interest and attention as did Boece's work. Certainly, despite its dedication to James V, it was unlikely to receive royal patronage, for Mair put forward a theory of kingship which, for all his desire for stronger monarchy, made no bones of the

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1. Some indication of the kind of reception Mair's views were likely to meet with in Scotland is provided by the fact that Gavin Douglas, otherwise a good friend of Mair's, warned the historian of England, Polydore Vergil, not to rely on the theologian's account of the origins of the Scots and supplied him instead with a version of the legend of Gathelus and Scota. Polydore remained distinctly dubious, but there is no reason to think that Douglas' reaction to Mair's scepticism was not shared by the majority of educated Scots. For details regarding this episode, see The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas, ed. John Small (Edinburgh, 1874), i, clvii-clxi.



fact that kings were accountable to their subjects. This theory, couched in much more precise and sophisticated terms than Boece's constitutionally ambiguous examples of tyrannicide, was to prove of some importance in the sixteenth century and it is to it that we must now turn our attention.

### III

In fact, in some respects at least, Mair's concept of kingship differs hardly at all from that which we have already encountered innumerable times among medieval Scottish writers. He too described the ideal king in terms of a typology of virtue derived from classical and Christian sources and identified the administration of justice as the monarch's primary function. He considered David I, for example, to be 'remarkable for the virtues of temperance, fortitude, justice, clemency, and regard for religion', praised him for his moderation and avoidance of luxury and, above all, dwelt approvingly on his evident concern that justice should benefit the poor of the realm as well as the rich and powerful.<sup>1</sup> Mair was, moreover, equally as aware as any of his predecessors that the manners of the prince were an example which all would follow:

With a good king you shall find the court good, and  
with a bad king you shall find the court bad, all  
the world over. Nor is it hard to give a reason for  
this. The inferior spheres are regulated in their

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1. Mair, History, 138-9. For similar comments on kingship emphasizing the importance of justice in particular, see *ibid.*, 181 (on Alexander II) and 191 (on Alexander III).

course according to the ... primum mobile; courtiers make it their study to please their king, show themselves apes as it were of his every action, and imitate what they see to be agreeable to him.<sup>1</sup>

Such conventional ideas, however, although not infrequently expressed in the History, do not have the same pivotal function in Mair's thinking that they have in the mainstream of the Scottish chronicle tradition. Rather, they were truisms upon which the theologian did not feel it necessary to dwell and which were subordinated to problems of more wide-ranging significance. Among these was that of the source and extent of a ruler's power : from where did he derive his authority? Was that authority absolute or limited? And could he under any circumstances be deprived of it? Such questions, barely raised in the literature we have discussed thus far, are a central preoccupation of John Mair's History.

In the context of the homage controversy, for example, we have already encountered Mair arguing that, even if a Scottish king were to recognize the English claim to suzerainty over Scotland, the submission would remain invalid because a kingdom cannot be alienated without the consent of the people. 'The king holds his right of a free people', declared Mair, 'nor can he grant that right to anyone against the will of that people'.<sup>2</sup> This contention was based on Mair's view of the king as a public officer possessing, not absolute, but merely conditional rights over his kingdom. A king, he wrote, does not have the 'full and fair possession' of his realm 'which a private

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1. Ibid., 141-2.

2. Ibid., 158.



owner has of his own estate', nor (varying the analogy) does he have 'the same unconditional possession of his kingdom that you have of your coat'.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the king is merely a 'governor' whose primary function is to ensure the welfare of the people who originally appointed him:

... the king is a public person, and altogether such in this manner, that he presides over his kingdom for the common weal and the greater advantage of the same ... For he holds of his people no other right within his kingdom but as its governor.<sup>2</sup>

The king's authority in his kingdom, therefore, is conditional upon the fulfilment of certain public duties and when he fails to perform these functions, 'when the reins of government are by his very touch defiled, when he shows himself a squanderer of public treasure, and brings his country to the verge of ruin, he is no longer worthy to rule'.<sup>3</sup> Under these circumstances, indeed, he may be legitimately stripped of his authority by those who initially bestowed it upon him. For, as this argument implies throughout, sovereignty lies ultimately, not with the king, but with the people and, if 'the whole people be above the king', it follows 'that at the will and pleasure of the people kings might be deposed'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., 219, 216.

2. Ibid., 220. Mair frequently implied that the king was a public person, warning him, for example, that he should not 'expose himself to the chance of war' unless he had 'the consent, express or implicit, of his people' (ibid., 125).

3. Ibid., 220.

4. Ibid., 219.

Mair deployed these arguments in support of popular sovereignty and the concomitant rights of resistance and deposition in the course of a lengthy discussion of the rival claims of John Balliol and Robert Bruce to the Scottish throne.<sup>1</sup> In the light of them, it is not surprising that his belief that Bruce 'alone and his heirs had and have an indisputable claim to the kingdom of Scotland' had nothing to do with the principles of heredity. On the contrary, Mair contended that, whatever the priorities of birth, by doing homage to Edward I of England, Balliol 'showed himself thereby unfit to reign, and justly was deprived of his right, and of the right inhering in his children, by those in whom alone the decision vested'. And, as he went on to make clear, the power to make that decision was vested 'in the rest of the kingdom':

A free people confers authority upon its first king, and his power is dependent upon the whole people; for no other source of power had Fergus, the first king of Scotland; and thus you shall find it where you will and when you will from the beginning of the world ... And it is impossible to deny that a king held from his people his right to rule, inasmuch as you can give him no other; but just so it was that the whole people united in their choice of Robert Bruce, as one who had deserved well of the realm of Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

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1. They also, however, occur in much the same form in his theological works. For an analysis of his thought with reference to these other writings, see in particular J. H. Burns, 'Politia Regalis et Optima : The Political Ideas of John Mair', History of Political Thought, II (1981-2), 31-61. See also Francis Oakley, 'On the Road from Constance to 1688 : The Political Thought of John Major and George Buchanan', Journal of British Studies, I (1962), 1-31; and Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge, 1978), ii, 117-23.
  2. Mair, History, 213-4.



In other words, possessing only gubernatorial rather than absolute authority in the kingdom, Balliol had no right to alienate and thus to impair the integrity of the 'mystical body' of the Scottish realm without his subjects' consent. According to Mair, he did not have that consent and was, therefore, legitimately expelled from the kingdom and Bruce lawfully elected in his place.<sup>1</sup>

If the above quotations suggest that Mair's political theory was uncompromisingly populist, however, other passages make clear that such a view must be substantially modified. For, although he appears here quite unequivocal in his attribution of sovereignty to 'the whole people', he proceeds immediately to qualify these assertions in significant respects. He argues, for example, that:

Whose it is to appoint a king, his it likewise is to decide any incident of a doubtful character that may arise concerning that king; but it is from the people, and most of all from the chief men and nobility who act for the common people, that kings have their institution; it belongs therefore to princes, prelates and nobles to decide as to any ambiguity that may emerge in regard to a king; and their decision shall remain inviolable.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that it is not 'the whole people' but rather prominent members of the community acting on their behalf who wield the sovereign power where it is necessary to resist or depose an evil prince. For the common people, in fact, Mair elsewhere reveals himself to have little more than contempt. In his eyes, 'there is nothing more unprofitable than a rebellion of the common people and government at their hands':

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1. Ibid., 214.

2. Ibid., 215 (emphasis added).

As well in fact be governed by brute beasts as by them; and, to say truly, they are but a beast with many heads ... There is nothing for it but the sword when the common people rise in wanton insolence against the state; otherwise they will confound in one common ruin themselves and all else.<sup>1</sup>

Mair's theory of 'popular' sovereignty, therefore, certainly did not extend so far as to allow the direct participation of the common people in any aspect of government. Indeed, as far as resistance was concerned, he sought to restrict the radical implications of his theory still further. For example, the assassination of King John of England by a 'wicked monk' provided him with the opportunity of condemning out of hand the idea of single-handed tyrannicide : for even if 'the commonwealth may take some profit by the death of kings, yet on no consideration can it be allowed to a private person ... to kill them'.<sup>2</sup> More significantly perhaps, he also condemned the deposition of Richard II of England by a nobility and common people characterized by 'fickleness'. To depose a king for so 'slight a cause', he wrote, merely makes 'an easy opening for the horns of rebellion' and is 'a thing to be shunned as a plague, and certain to involve the ruin of any commonwealth'.<sup>3</sup> For Mair, in fact, deposition was not an action which could be undertaken either lightly or without proper and formal deliberation. Indeed, he argued that 'if kings are any way corrigible they are not to be dismissed, for what fault you will' and went on to state quite clearly that, 'unless under a solemn consideration of the

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1. Ibid., 375-6. For further adverse comments on the common people, see also *ibid.*, 302, 378.

2. Ibid., 161.

3. Ibid., 308.



matter by the three estates, and ripe judgment wherein no element of passion shall intrude, kings are not to be deposed'.<sup>1</sup> Just as this reference to 'the three estates' recalls the earlier one to 'princes, prelates and nobles', so it seems reasonable to conclude that, at least for practical purposes, Mair believed ultimate sovereignty to lie, not with 'the whole people', but rather with representatives of the community formally assembled in a recognized constitutional body. Moreover, without formal authorization from such a representative institution, no action was to be taken against even a blatantly errant king.

Although Mair's theory is not, then, quite as radical as it at first appears, it nevertheless represents an explicit and emphatic denial of the absolute authority of the prince and an attempt to elaborate a theory of limited, constitutional monarchy. Unlike Boece's precedents for deposition, moreover, Mair's is a radical ideology of considerable theoretical sophistication. This ideology was not, of course, created ex nihilo. On the contrary, Mair was drawing on a distinct and distinguished tradition of political thought which is closely associated with the fifteenth century conciliarist movement and which had widespread currency in his own University of Paris. Mair, in fact, along with his pupil and colleague, Jacques Almain, was the leading proponent of conciliar ideas in the early sixteenth century, reviving and extending the theory that a general council representative of the whole church was superior to the pope and that the latter was a constitutional monarch possessing, not absolute, but

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1. Ibid., 219.

merely ministerial authority.<sup>1</sup> The consonance of this theory of church government with the conception of secular politics just outlined should be readily apparent. Nor, given Mair's debt to the writings of such theorists as William of Ockham, Jean Gerson and Pierre d'Ailly, is it surprising to find ideas originally developed in ecclesiastical controversies applied also in the secular sphere.<sup>2</sup> Like his predecessors, indeed, Mair on occasions reversed the comparison and argued, for example, that because in a secular polity an incorrigibly unworthy king 'must be deposed by the community over which he rules', so in the ecclesiastical polity if a pope is similarly incorrigible he too 'must be deposed'.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps more significantly still, however, Mair showed no hesitation in equating an assembly of the three estates with a general council of the church. He tells us, for example, that after the battle of Bannockburn 'the Scots held at Ayr a great assembly, of the kind which the Britons call a parliament, whither convened the three estates representative of the

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1. Mair's conciliarist opinions are most readily accessible in his A Disputation on the Authority of a Council, ed. and trans. J. K. Cameron, in Advocates of Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus, ed. Matthew Spinka (Library of Christian Classics XIV, London, 1953), 175-84. For an analysis of both his and Almain's views, see Francis Oakley, 'Almain and Major: Conciliar Theory on the Eve of the Reformation', American Historical Review, LXX (1965), 673-90.
  2. The contention that the secular and ecclesiastical polities were directly analogous was fundamental to the contribution of these 'radical scholastics' to general political theory: see Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, ii, 41, 43-7, 114-7. For analyses of their individual ideas, with which Mair's have important points of contact, see A. S. McGrade, The Political Thought of William of Ockham (Cambridge, 1974); J. B. Morrall, Gerson and the Great Schism (Manchester, 1960); and Francis Oakley, The Political Thought of Pierre d'Ailly (New Haven and London, 1964).
  3. Mair, Disputation on the Authority of a Council, 180.



realm, just as a duly constituted council represents the whole church', and there it was unanimously agreed that 'Robert Bruce should remain the unquestioned king of Scotland'.<sup>1</sup> By implication, therefore, just as sovereignty in the church was ultimately vested in a general council representative of all its members, so sovereignty in a secular commonwealth was ultimately vested in an assembly or parliament representative of all its members.<sup>2</sup>

In Mair's view, then, Scottish kings, like all others, were constitutional monarchs possessing only ministerial powers delegated to them by the sovereign authority of the three estates assembled in parliament. As a Scotsman, however, he was not unaware that the Scottish parliament had never been a particularly well-defined or politically self-conscious institution. Shrewdly, moreover, he recognized that its lack of a clear constitutional function stemmed largely from the absence of regular taxation in Scotland, a situation which Mair thought distinguished Scotland from 'all other kingdoms' and of which he disapproved because 'the political practice of many kingdoms is likely to be safer than the political practice of one'.<sup>3</sup> The point of this was not simply to endorse the idea of general taxation but, more importantly, to enhance the powers exercised by parliament. For Mair believed that taxes could only be levied with the consent of the

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1. Mair, History, 242.

2. This does not, however, necessarily imply numerical representation. Similarly, 'majority' decisions taken within parliament were seen by Mair as decisions of the maior et sanior pars (see Oakley, 'From Constance to 1688', 18-9, where he refers to this as 'a qualitative as well as a quantitative superiority').

3. Mair, History, 347.

three estates and that this was an invaluable lever for exerting pressure on a wayward monarch. Kings, he wrote, were not to be granted the power to tax 'except in cases of clear necessity' and it belonged neither to them nor to their privy councils 'to declare the emergence of any such necessity, but only to the three estates'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it was the exercise of such powers that seems to have prompted Mair's admiration of the English constitution and which possibly also strengthened the case for union in his eyes. For, in refuting the argument that once a king had been granted the power to levy a small tax he would immediately set about increasing it, Mair cited the example of the English who, significantly enough, 'in civil polity are at least not less wise than we are - and to my thinking they are wiser'. If in England, he argued, kings were to levy taxes without 'the consent of the three estates', the people would 'rise against their kings' and force them to back down. There is an admiring note in Mair's tone here - as well as in his description of the English as 'more hotly jealous of their rights' than the people of other kingdoms - which may well have added weight to his support for union.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, there seems little doubt that he believed the Scots would benefit considerably from following the more sophisticated constitutional practices of their southern neighbours.

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1. Ibid., 352.

2. Ibid., 347-8.



## IV

To sum up, then, Mair's advocacy of union clearly stemmed from an acute sense of the deficiencies and instability of the Scottish polity. The Scots, he argued, suffered badly from comparisons with their English neighbours and could only benefit from an association with the latter's more sophisticated and secure institutional structure. By no means, however, did this imply a surrender to England's age-old claim to feudal superiority over Scotland. On the contrary, the British realm which Mair envisaged could only be successfully and, above all, peacefully realized if it was seen by both parties as a union of equal partners. Nor did Mair think it likely that this could be achieved except through dynastic marriages which would unite the sovereign crowns of England and Scotland in the person of a single monarch. Hence, in dedicating the History to James V, he stressed the Scottish king's 'most lofty descent in the line of both kingdoms of Greater Britain' and, indeed, elsewhere in the History, was at pains to point out the virtuous attributes of the Stewart dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Mair, like other sixteenth century Scots, was aware that very few lives stood between the Stewarts and the throne of England. In such a context, an apologia, not just for union, but for the potential British ruling house may have seemed not inappropriate. Yet union under the Stewarts, if finally achieved in 1603, looked far from inevitable in the early sixteenth century. Indeed, in the 1530's, Henry VIII's desperate search for a Tudor heir to his English kingdom

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1. Ibid., cxxxiii, 368.

set in motion a train of events with monumental and potentially divisive consequences for the British monarchies. For the English break with Rome and the spread of Protestantism through the political establishment placed Scotland in a delicate but strategically crucial position on the European stage. Her diplomatic ties and confessional allegiance suddenly, if fortuitously, assumed unprecedented significance and much depended on whether she too would break with Rome and, severing the ancient alliance with Catholic France, realign herself with Protestant England. In this new context, and particularly under Protestant influence, the idea of union was to be broadcast with renewed intensity and with far-reaching implications. It was a context, however, in which the gradualist approach of an academic such as Mair would find it hard to prosper.



## Chapter Five

Union and Protestantism

## I

Although argued with unprecedented force, John Mair's desire for a gradual and above all peaceful unification of the British monarchies through a series of dynastic marriages was not an altogether novel idea. The marriage of James IV to Margaret Tudor in 1503, itself the culmination of a pro-English policy pursued by James III in the 1470's, is indicative of a growing awareness in Scotland that rapprochement with England might be more beneficial than the traditional alliance with France. As one might expect, however, there was no little opposition to such a policy : Hary's Wallace, for example, was almost certainly written in protest against James III's Anglophilic stance, while those who rebelled against the same king in 1488 believed there was much to be gained by declaring in defence of their actions that James was guilty of 'the inbringing of Inglissmen to the perpetuale subieccione of the realm'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the experience of Flodden in particular brought home to the Scots the fact that the French alliance seldom operated to their advantage and thereafter the Scottish nobility were extremely reluctant to venture south of Tweed at the behest of their ancient allies. Conversely, even Hector Boece,

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1. The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, ed. T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814-75), ii, 210. For an analysis of Scottish foreign policy in the fifteenth century, see N. A. T. Macdougall, 'Foreign Relations : England and France', in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London, 1977), 101-111.

despite the general tenor of his chronicle, was prepared on at least one occasion to concede that union with England 'under the empire and senyorie of ane king' would doubtless increase the strength and prosperity of Albion.<sup>1</sup> Mair's support for union, therefore, was neither entirely idiosyncratic nor wholly visionary : arguably, it was a policy which increasingly commended itself to Scotsmen aware of the disadvantages of the existing diplomatic ties with their fickle French ally and of the advantages of amity with their closest neighbour. In fact, had it not been for Henry VIII's crude diplomacy and barbaric military tactics, the idea of some form of British monarchy might have won considerable support in Scotland in the 1540's.

As it was, however, Henry's impatience and insensitivity merely strengthened the Scots' deep-rooted suspicions and mistrust of England. The old 'whig' view of Henry's foreign policy as dictated by his far-seeing desire to unify the British Isles in a grand imperial design seems no longer tenable. J. J. Scarisbrick, for example, doubts if he was 'either capable or guilty of such high statesmanship' and argues that his policy was motivated rather by the more traditionally English desire to execute some '"notable enterprise"' against France.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The History and Chronicles of Scotland : written in Latin by Hector Boece ... and translated by John Bellenden ..., ed. Thomas Maitland (Edinburgh, 1821), i, xxiv. Cf. *ibid.*, ii, 128-36, for a lengthy discussion of the relative merits of a French and English alliance which, although supposedly taking place in the age of Charlemagne, has obvious relevance to Boece's own time. I am grateful to Dr. Arthur Williamson for bringing these passages to my attention.
  2. J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII (Methuen paperback edtn., London, 1976), 548-50; a view endorsed in G. R. Elton, Reform and Reformation : England 1508-1558 (London, 1977), 304-5. For an example of the older view, see A. F. Pollard, Henry VIII (London, 1905), Ch.14. That Henry had no intrinsic interest in Scotland, far less in union, is well brought out in David M. Head, 'Henry VIII's Scottish Policy : A Reassessment', Scottish Historical Review, LXI (1982), 1-24.



Scotland was thus very much a secondary theatre for Henry, assuming significance only in relation to his continental designs and only when it was necessary to secure his northern frontier in order to further them. By the late 1530's, however, that necessity was becoming increasingly apparent for, having broken completely with Rome, Henry was becoming dangerously isolated in the world of international diplomacy and ever more fearful of a Habsburg-Valois coalition against him. Moreover, his nephew James V of Scotland, in defiance of Henry's cajolery and blandishments, had not only failed to follow England's example, but had instead reaffirmed his commitment to Rome and renewed the old alliance with France. By 1539 there appeared to be a real prospect of a papal coalition acting in concert to bring the schismatic English king to heel and Henry redoubled his efforts to detach Scotland from the French alliance. It was to no avail. The projected meeting of the kings of England and Scotland at York in 1541, for example, ended in humiliation for Henry when James failed to put in an appearance. Henry's position, however, was perhaps not as gloomy as it seemed. Not only did Francis I and Charles V find it impossible to work in harmony but, when Henry did take military action against the Scots, he found them extremely reluctant to fight on France's behalf. The result was the humiliating defeat of the Scots at Solway Moss in November 1542 and the death of James V, allegedly from shame, the following month.<sup>1</sup> Despite the traditional policy

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1. On the diplomatic background from a Scottish perspective, see Gordon Donaldson, Scotland : James V - James VII (repr. Edinburgh, 1971), Ch.2, and William Ferguson, Scotland's Relations with England : A Survey to 1707 (Edinburgh, 1977), Ch.4. Also of use is J. Wilson Ferguson, 'James V and the Scottish Church', in Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe, ed. T. K. Rabb and J. E. Seigel (Princeton, 1969), 52-76, esp. 64-8.

adopted by their king, therefore, many Scots seemed prepared rather to come to terms with England. It was a gradual change in attitude which Henry could have used to his advantage. Already, however, on the eve of the Solway Moss campaign, he had raised a spectre which militated against a peaceful realignment on the lines envisaged by John Mair. For, furious with James V, he had reverted to the ideas which had legitimated English aggression against the Scots since the Wars of Independence. That is, to give it its full title, he had issued A Declaration, Conteyning the Iust Causes and Consyderations, of this present warre with the Scottis, wherein alsoo appereth the trewe and right title, that the kinges most royall maiesty hath to the soverayntie of Scotlande.<sup>1</sup>

The Declaration is as typical of Henry VIII's hypocritical self-righteousness as it is representative of the imperialist arguments which Mair had sought so carefully to refute. It begins, for example, by contrasting Henry's honourable behaviour during James V's minority with the latter's subsequent ingratitude and dissimulation. Henry VII, it asserts, had intended that the marriage of his daughter to James IV should create an atmosphere of 'love, amitie, and perpetuall frendshyp' between future rulers of England and Scotland. Instead, James V has shown only duplicity and deceit towards Henry VIII and it is the Scottish king's 'unkynde dealing, uniust behaviour, [and] unprincely demeanour' which have left Henry no alternative but to 'use now our force and puissance againste him'. The present war, it

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1. The Declaration is reprinted as an appendix to The Complaynt of Scotlande, ed. James A. H. Murray (E.E.T.S., 1872), 191-206. All subsequent references are to this edition.



disarmingly assures the Scots, 'hath not proceded of any demaund of our right of superioritie', but only of 'present matter of displeasure, present iniury, present wrong mynistred by the Nephieu to the Uncle most unnaturally'.<sup>1</sup> But, it goes on more ominously, the claim to superiority has not been forgotten for, however magnanimous Henry has been in his treatment of his nephew, 'it is never the lesse true that the kynges of Scottes have alwayes knowledged the kynges of Englande superior lordes of the realme of Scotlande, and have done homage and fealtie for the same'. This contention the Declaration then proceeds to substantiate by general arguments from history, by examples of the 'instruments of homage' still extant in the English treasury, and lastly by other 'regesters and recordes' in the English king's possession.<sup>2</sup>

These 'proofs' of Scotland's dependency comprise more than half the total length of the Declaration and were evidently meant, not just as a vague threat, but as a serious attempt to legitimate Henry's assertion that no king 'hath more iuste title, more evident title, more certayn title, to any realme ... than we have to Scotland'.<sup>3</sup>

Predictably, the historical arguments are culled in their entirety from Galfridian tradition and, oblivious to Mair and other sceptics, Brutus and his sons once more do dutiful service in support of the English cause. Brutus, the Declaration asserts, was king of the whole island of Britain and on his death it was divided among his three sons,

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1. Ibid., 192-8.

2. Ibid., 198.

3. Ibid., 198.

the eldest, Lochrine, receiving that part now known as England and his brothers, Camber and Albanact, doing homage for their lesser kingdoms of Wales and Scotland respectively. 'How can there be a title', it asks, 'divised of a more playn begynninge, a more iuste begynninge, a more convenient begynninge for the order of this Island ...?'<sup>1</sup> That title, moreover, has never lapsed and has been continuously recognized by the kings of Scotland over many centuries. Moving to the second category of 'proofs', therefore, the Declaration goes on to cite no less than eighteen examples of Scottish monarchs doing homage to English superiors dating from the time of Edward the Confessor to the reign of Henry VI: 'All whiche homages and fealties as they appere by story to have been made and done at times and seasons as afore : so do there remayne instrumentes made ther upon and sealed with the seales of the kynges of Scotlande testifyenge the same'.<sup>2</sup> Nor, it quickly adds, were these homages done either (as most Scots chroniclers claimed) solely for lands held in England or (as Mair had argued) without the consent of the Scottish people. To substantiate the first point, an example of an instrument of homage is printed in full, while to demonstrate the second, recourse is had to other judicial records (relating, perhaps with Mair in mind, to John Balliol's submission to Edward I) which show parliamentary approval to have been obtained on at least one occasion.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the Declaration warns the Scots not to delude themselves that because English kings have in more recent times refrained from invoking their right it has

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1. Ibid., 198-9.

2. Ibid., 200-2.

3. Ibid., 202-4.



become invalid. The passing of time, it insists, does not imply any loss of right and should Henry deem it necessary to reassert his claim he is quite at liberty to do so.<sup>1</sup> Drawing an all but transparent veil over this threat, however, the Declaration ends by disavowing any such intention on Henry's part. The king of England, it concludes, wishes rather 'to reioyse and take comfort in the frendshyppe of our Nephieu, as our neyghbour, than to move matier unto hym of displeasure, whereby to alienate suche naturall inclination of love, as he shuld have towarde us'.<sup>2</sup>

The Declaration was the opening salvo in an ideological barrage which, continuing throughout the 1540's, was aimed at persuading the Scots both of the advantages of an English alliance and (somewhat less credibly) of England's honourable intentions towards them. However, although the arguments deployed there resurface on many subsequent occasions, in the aftermath of the Solway Moss campaign the nature of unionist propaganda changed dramatically. The threat of subjugation inherent in English claims to superiority was never entirely absent but, with the premature death of James V and the accession to his throne of the week-old Mary Stewart, a new dimension was added to Anglo-Scottish diplomacy and to the ideological struggles which accompanied it. For Henry was now quick to adopt the type of policy which Mair had previously advocated: namely, that the betrothal of Mary to his own son and heir, the five year old Prince Edward, would solve the problem of Anglo-Scottish relations permanently and without bloodshed. Such a marriage, Henry believed, would give him a controlling

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1. Ibid., 204-6.

2. Ibid., 206.

interest in the northern kingdom and thus allow him to indulge in his continental ventures without fear of being stabbed in the back. Consequently, he at once set about persuading the Scots to agree to a marriage which, without prejudice to either party, would result in dynastic union and perpetual peace and amity between the realms.

Or so, initially at least, it was meant to appear to the Scots. But Henry had no intention of surrendering his claim to suzerainty and seemed to the Scots to intimate as much when he foolishly attempted to browbeat them into immediately delivering up their infant queen into English hands. With the Declaration still ringing in their ears, nothing could have been better calculated to arouse the Scots' mistrust of the English king's ultimate intentions. Indeed, even when Henry conceded this particular point in the Treaty of Greenwich of July 1543 and agreed that Mary should stay in Scotland until the completion of her tenth year, few Scots were convinced that he would honour the guarantees of Scottish liberty and freedom written into the marriage treaty. As will become clear in the next chapter, many Scots believed Henry wanted nothing less than to subjugate the realm and, exploiting these fears, Cardinal David Beaton had little trouble in organizing opposition to the treaty or in having a Scottish parliament repudiate it altogether in December 1543. Nor were the Scots' suspicions entirely unjustified for, however reticent he was about it in public, privately the claim to superiority continued to figure in Henry's thinking. For example, his initial success in Scotland was achieved with the help of an Anglophile party heavily reinforced by Scottish nobles captured at Solway Moss and subsequently 'assured' to the English cause on terms which bound them to support not only the intended



marriage, but also, failing that, Henry's personal governance of Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, whenever the Scots proved stubborn or recalcitrant or whenever Henry's patience wore particularly thin, the claim to lordship provided a convenient stick with which to goad on allies and to beat down enemies. When in August 1543, for example, it was thought that the Scots would despatch Mary to France, Henry reacted by informing the earl of Arran, the Scottish governor, that he would seize for himself the Scottish Lowlands 'by force of his title of superioritie' and make Arran king in the north.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, then, when the Scots repudiated the treaty and Henry's rage found an outlet in Hertford's devastating invasion of 1544, the use of force was justified not only in terms of the Scots' perfidy but also in terms of the English king's 'title and interest ... to this realm'.<sup>3</sup> The so-called 'Rough Wooing', however, was hardly calculated either to demonstrate Henry's good-will towards the Scots or to convince them of the benefits to be gained from an English alliance.<sup>4</sup> In the face of such savage reprisals the Scots predictably fell back both on their old French ally and, as we shall see, on the patriotic ideology which was their traditional riposte to English aggression. But in the 1540's, Henry's brutality apart, this ideology faced a severer test than ever

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1. See The Hamilton Papers, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh, 1890-2), i, nos.276-7.

2. Ibid., i, no.439.

3. Ibid., i, no.222.

4. For Henry's well-known, but nonetheless harrowing instructions to Hertford on the prosecution of the war, see *ibid.*, ii, nos.207, 217. Less well-known, but equally cold-blooded is the discussion of the terms of a proclamation to be issued in Scotland offering the chance to 'assure' with England only after as much destruction as possible had been perpetrated (*ibid.*, ii, nos.194, 197, 222).

before, for the cause of union had much more skilled and persuasive advocates than the arrogant and irascible English king. Before examining the patriotic response, therefore, we must first consider the development of unionist ideology in the course of the wars of the 1540's.<sup>1</sup>

## II

Despite (or perhaps because of) Henry's unrestrained violence towards the Scots, he was never entirely without friends in the northern kingdom, some of whom were prepared both to act and to write on his behalf and in support of the marriage.<sup>2</sup> One such was John Elder who, shortly after James V's death, furnished the English king with a map of Scotland (now lost) which he accompanied with an obsequious letter expressing the desire that 'boithe the realmes of England and of Scotlande may be joyned in one; and so your noble Maiestie for to be superiour and kynge'.<sup>3</sup> Elder described himself as a 'Reddshanke' or Highlander and, in the course of his rambling letter, revealed that he came from Caithness, had lived in the Western Isles, and had been

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1. For a brief and rather superficial analysis of some of the works examined in what follows, see Marcus Merriman, 'War and Propaganda during the Rough Wooing', Scottish Tradition, IX/X, (1979-80), 20-30.
  2. On the extent of and motives for Henry's Scottish support, see Marcus Merriman, 'The Assured Scots : Scottish Collaborators with England during the Rough Wooing', Scottish Historical Review, XLVII (1968), 10-34.
  3. 'A Proposal for uniting Scotland with England, addressed to King Henry VIII by John Elder, Clerke, A Reddshanke', printed in The Bannatyne Miscellany (Bannatyne Club, 1827-55), i, 1-18, quotation from p.8.



a student and scholar at the universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen and St. Andrews.<sup>1</sup> He assured Henry of both the loyalty and hardiness of the Highlanders and expressed the hope that the king's 'princelie magnanimitie, Salamonically wysdome and sapience, and heroicall humanitie and benevolence' would ensure the Highland chieftains treatment as lenient as he believed had been meted out to their equivalents in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> More importantly in the present context, however, he also believed that Scotland was 'a part of your Highnes empyre of England' whose first ruler had been Albanactus, the second son of Brutus, after whom it was named 'Albon'. He explicitly denied the truth of the legend of Scota and the Scots' Egyptian descent and thereby also, by implication, denied the original basis of Scotland's political autonomy. Instead, he preferred to endorse the Galfridian version of Britain's early history and Scotland's historic and continuing feudal dependence on England.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from Elder's Highland orientation and eccentricities, there is nothing startlingly novel in these arguments. What is perhaps more interesting is the religious or, more properly, anti-papal rationale behind his proposal for union. Elder, for example, not only blamed James V's earlier reluctance to meet Henry at York on the 'traiterous preistis' who dominated the Scottish king's council, but went on to say that there was 'no region in Europe, so perturbed, so molestide, so vexide, and so utterly opprest with bussheps, monckes, Rome-rykers,

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1. Ibid., 9-10.

2. Ibid., 8-9, 14-5.

3. Ibid., 11-12.

and preistis' as Scotland. And so he thought it would remain unless Henry, presumably acting on his claim to superiority, were to invade Scotland and 'hunt, dryve, and smoyke the forsaide fals papisticall foxis, with all ther partakers, out of ther cavis, with bowis, billis, fyre, and swerde'.<sup>1</sup> It was, moreover, these same priests who were now thwarting Henry's 'godly porpas and desire' for a marriage whereby, 'hypocrisy and supersticioun abolissede, and the Frenche Kinge cleane pluckt out of our hartis, England and Scotland, and the posteritie of boith, may live for ever in peax, love and amitie'.<sup>2</sup> Here Elder sounded a note which was to ring in Scottish ears with ever-heightening intensity as the decade wore on. In the eyes of the Protestant reformers, the marriage of Mary to the heir of 'the empyre of England' was a providential opportunity to sever Scottish ties with both France and Rome and to establish a permanent alliance with an England newly-purged of papal influence. Elder was but the first of many to associate such a diplomatic revolution with a reformation in religion : as we shall see, by the later 1540's the cause of union had become closely identified with the cause of Protestantism and both were being preached with apocalyptic fervency.

Before discussing these other writings in favour of union, however, one further aspect of Elder's letter deserves consideration : that is, his several references to England as an 'empire'. It was suggested in a previous chapter that, in the later fifteenth century, James III had attempted to enhance the prestige of the Scottish crown

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1. Ibid., 17.

2. Ibid., 16.



by attributing to it the kind of jurisdictional autonomy implied by the Bartolist formula rex in regno suo est imperator.<sup>1</sup> In effect, apart from adding lustre to his own kingship, the purpose of this claim to imperial status was simply to limit the extent to which either the pope or the Holy Roman Emperor might interfere with the internal administration of the realm through the creation, for example, of notaries public. In this respect, it was a device equally well-known in England where, as early as the late fourteenth century, it had been employed as a means of bolstering the crown's control of the church at the papacy's expense. In England, however, in the context of the Henrician Reformation, the terms 'empire' and 'imperial' assumed much more sweeping connotations with which Elder may well have been familiar and which cannot be lightly overlooked. For, whereas in the middle ages the imperial crown had been invoked simply to curtail the pope's jurisdiction within the realm, in the sixteenth century it was used to deny that he possessed any such jurisdiction at all. The famous assertion contained in the preamble to the Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome (1533) - 'this realm of England is an empire ... governed by one Supreme Head and King having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same' - was intended to legitimate, not any medieval notion of partial autonomy, but the complete jurisdictional self-sufficiency which the English crown had attained through Henry VIII's repudiation of Rome and personal assumption of the headship of the church in England. However well disguised in traditional 'imperial' terminology, such an idea of royal supremacy in ecclesiastical matters was a startlingly novel contention with quite

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1. See above, p.76.

revolutionary implications for both the English church and the English state.<sup>1</sup>

But what of its implications for Scotland and what, first of all, of John Elder's use of 'empire'? Elder refers to England as an 'empire' on three occasions in the course of his short letter to Henry VIII and, although one cannot be completely certain that he employed the term in the sense pioneered in the Act in Restraint of Appeals, his evident anti-papalism together with his explicit reference to Henry as 'Defender of the Christen Faithe, and in erth next unto God, of the Church of England and Irland supreme hed' make such an inference seem not unreasonable.<sup>2</sup> If this is correct, moreover, then the implications for Scotland transcend any simple expression of approval of Henrician caesaro-papalism. For, as we have seen, Elder not only claimed that Scotland was 'part of your Highnes empyre of England', but did so on the grounds that her first ruler was Albanactus, the second son of Brutus. Now, in the Act in Restraint of Appeals, the basis of England's imperial status - and, by implication, of the royal supremacy - is said to be manifest in 'divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles' and there is no reason to think that Elder's English contemporaries would have identified these unspecified sources as anything other than the works of Geoffrey of

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1. As this suggests, in the lengthy controversy in Past and Present between G. R. Elton on the one hand and Penry Williams and G. L. Harriss on the other, I take Elton to have presented the more convincing case - at least as regards the interpretation of the term 'empire'. For the various contributions to the debate (under the general heading 'A Revolution in Tudor History?'), see Past and Present, XXV (1963), 3-58 (Williams and Harriss); XXIX (1964), 26-49 (Elton); XXXI (1965), 87-96 (Williams and Harriss); and XXXII (1965), 103-9 (Elton).

2. Elder, 'Proposal', 7.



Monmouth and his many disciples.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it would have been perfectly natural for Henrician Englishmen to equate the 'old authentic histories and chronicles' with that same Brut tradition which had been used for centuries to demonstrate the dependency of Scotland upon the English crown. To contemporary Scots, of course, the equation would not have come quite so naturally, but to those who were both Protestant and Anglophile the temptation to make it might nevertheless prove overwhelming. For if the Brut could be used to legitimate England's claim to be an empire, it might also be used - as Elder intimated - to prove that Scotland shared the same imperial status and was thereby equally free to renounce the priestly authority of Rome. In short, Galfridian historiography could provide Elder and his ilk with a convenient source of legitimation, not simply for an English, but for a British empire. It is perhaps hardly surprising, then, to find the anonymous author of an account of Hertford's Scottish invasion of 1544 referring to Henry VIII's occupation of 'themperiall seate of the monarchie of all Bretayne'.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, he

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1. Such an identification is in fact made in most modern works on this period : e.g., Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, 355-7, 409-10, and A. G. Dickens, The English Reformation (Fontana edtn., London and Glasgow, 1967), 167-8. Further research has revealed, however, that the Collectanea satis copiosa - a manuscript collection of historical evidences which was compiled for Henry to provide proof of his imperial status - makes little use of the Brut (see G. D. Nicholson, 'The Nature and Function of Historical Argument in the Henrician Reformation', Unpubl. Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge, 1976, esp. Ch.4 : 'The Imperial Crown and the Act of Appeals'). The arguments of the Collectanea were presumably meant for international rather than domestic consumption, however, and the undoubtedly calculated vagueness of the Act of Appeals' reference to 'histories and chronicles' does nothing to preclude identification with the Brut tradition by Henry's subjects, while at the same time leaving limitless scope for the deployment of other arguments more likely to convince an international audience.
  2. The Late Expedition in Scotlande, reprinted in Fragments of Scottish History, ed. John Dalryel (Edinburgh, 1798), 1-16, at 11.

was not alone : by the later 1540's it was a fairly common phrase in the unionist literature generated by the Anglo-Scottish war.

If the foregoing argument appears to rely more on inference than evidence, then a look at the writings of James Henrysone will provide a more substantive picture of how the Brut tradition was used not only to underwrite the royal supremacy but also to legitimate a concept of British monarchy both Protestant and imperial. Henrysone (or Harryson) was an Edinburgh merchant of some substance who after the first English invasion of May 1544 voluntarily accompanied Hertford back to England.<sup>1</sup> Once there he became a pensioner of the English crown and worked hard to promote the English cause in Scotland. Much the more lasting part of this work was, however, literary and in 1547, after the death of Henry VIII and on the eve of Hertford's (now Lord Protector Somerset's) third invasion of Scotland, he wrote An Exhortacion to the Scottes to conforme themselves to the honourable, Expedient, & godly Union betweene the two Realmes of Englande & Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Henry's death had added renewed force and cogency to arguments in favour of the marriage of his successor Edward VI to the young queen of Scots and Henrysone needed little prompting to write a tract in its support. The result was a unionist apologia of peculiar and at times potent appeal.

As an ardent unionist, it is probably not surprising that in the course of his Exhortacion Henrysone employed arguments not dissimilar to those put forward a quarter of a century before by John Mair. Like

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1. For these and other biographical details, see Merriman, 'The Assured Scots', 22-3.

2. Henrysone's Exhortacion is reprinted in The Complaynt of Scotlande, ed. Murray, 207-36. Subsequent references are to this edition.



Mair, for example, he believed it essential that 'those hatefull termes of Scottes & Englishemen' should be 'abolished and blotted oute for ever' and that the inhabitants of the British Isles should 'al agre in the onely title and name of Britons ... and the selfe realme, beeyng eftsones reduced into the fourme of one sole Monarchie, shalbee called Britayn'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in order to support his case, he went to considerable lengths to refute the Scottish foundation legend as retold by Hector Boece and John Bellenden. For example, he dismissed 'the new fonde fables of our Scottishe Poetes, framed upon phantasie, without auctoritie precedent', as being invented 'of a sette purpose, for norishyng division in the twoo realmes' and, with some arithmetical ingenuity, calculated that the marriage between Gathelus and Scota was impossible 'the Bride beinge elder than ye Bridegroom by xii.C. and xl. yeres'.<sup>2</sup> At this point, however, the similarities with Mair end, for not only did Henrysone explicitly abridge and endorse the arguments in favour of English suzerainty set out in Henry VIII's Declaration,<sup>3</sup> but he also accepted and manipulated the Brut tradition in order to demonstrate what Mair had consistently striven to deny, namely the historicity of a British realm which included the kingdom of the Scots.

Following Galfridian tradition, for example, Henrysone retailed the story of Brutus and his three sons and the division of the whole island among the latter on their father's death. He further insisted

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1. Ibid., 230.

2. Ibid., 219-20, 222-3.

3. Ibid., 225-7.

that at that time and, indeed, for a further six centuries thereafter, there were no Scots inhabiting the island.<sup>1</sup> From the very beginning, therefore, there was a single pre-eminent monarch in the British Isles and the original inhabitants were all Britons. On this basis, Henrysone went on to offer a quite novel reason for continuing to ignore the distinction between Scots and English. For, he argued, although the island had often subsequently been invaded and occupied by Romans, Picts, Saxons, Danes, Scots and Normans, the original Britons and the original British blood had never been entirely extinguished: 'for no countrey can bee so invaded by straungers, yt [= that] the whole race of the olde inhabitants, can bee worne all out, but that the substaunce or more parte, shall still remaine'. No matter, then, according to Henrysone, when either Scots or English first settled on the island for, 'I doubte not to saie, and am able to prove, that the great parte of bothe realmes, is come of ye old Britayns. And thoughe we have beene mixed with foreyn nacions, whereby the Britayne tongue is chaunged & out of use, yet doth the bloud and generacion remain ...'<sup>2</sup> In other words, Scots and English were not also Britons simply because, as Mair had implied, they inhabited the same British island, but rather because they had inherited the same British blood. The idea of a unitary Britain was thus based, not on any accident of geography, but on a common ethnic identity.

As if himself not entirely convinced by this argument, however, having advanced it briefly, Henrysone at once reverted to more conventional reasons for considering Britain as a single entity. But here

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1. Ibid., 214-6.

2. Ibid., 216.



again his reasoning is neither wholly unoriginal nor, in the present context, unimportant. Although he had contended that the whole island was in the beginning ruled by a single monarch, Henrysone was forced to concede that subsequently it was broken up into a number of kingdoms with no recognized supreme overlord. Consequently, he moved rapidly on to emphasize that all these kingdoms were in the end conquered by the Romans who brought 'the whole islande in subieccion' and to focus attention firmly on the heroic figure of Constantine, the first Christian emperor but also, and crucially, a king of the Britons.<sup>1</sup> The belief that Constantine was of British birth and descent was part-and-parcel of the Brut tradition and Henrysone was merely following the lead of Geoffrey of Monmouth in arguing that the emperor was the son of the Roman general Constancius who, through his marriage to Helen, the daughter and heir of Coyll, king of the Britons, had gained possession of the British throne.<sup>2</sup> For Henrysone this meant that Constantine's claim to the kingship of Britain was doubly sure, for in him:

bothe titles, as wel that whiche the Romaynes had by conquest, as also that which his mother Helene had (as heire of Britayn) wer united & knit together, and he without al doubt or controversy was very Emperor of al Britayn, wherby the island after long servitude was at last restored (as itwer by Gods providence) to his former libertie & honor, themp-  
eror beyng begotten in Britayn, sonne of her that was heir of Britayne, borne in Britayne, and create  
Emperor in Britayne.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., 217-8.

2. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, ed. and trans. Lewis Thorpe (Penguin edtn., Harmondsworth, 1966), 132ff. Much the same story is in fact repeated in Bellenden, History, i, 218-9.

3. Henrysone, Exhortacion, 218.

Although Constantine's British connection was a commonplace belief in the sixteenth century, it is nevertheless impossible to ignore the extreme importance which Henrysone attached to it in the Exhortacion. Nor is the reason far to seek, for if in Constantine were united both Roman emperorship and British kingship, then, arguably, his successors in Britain fell heir not just to his kingdom but also to his imperial status. This was an assertion which had appealed fleetingly even to Henry VIII in his efforts to legitimate the royal supremacy. But basing his claim to imperial status on national legend had proved less than convincing in an international context and, with foreign laughter still ringing in his ears, Henry had quickly turned to more respectable authorities.<sup>1</sup> In a narrowly British context, however, invoking Geoffrey of Monmouth to legitimate even an action as momentous as the breach with Rome would have appeared much less risible and Henrysone was prepared not only to take Constantine's British kingdom quite seriously, but also to argue on that basis that his successors in Britain had always worn 'a close crown Emperiall, in token that the lande is an empire free in itself, & subject to no superior but GOD'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as we have seen, to a Scotsman anxious to associate his own country with Henry's 'empire',

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1. The importance of Constantine in Henry's own thinking is probably exaggerated in Richard Koebner, '"The Imperial Crown of this Realm" : Henry VIII, Constantine the Great and Polydore Vergil', Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, XXVI (1953), 29-52. For example, after the imperial ambassador had scoffed at Constantine's alleged association with England, Henry appears to have lost all interest in his illustrious predecessor (see Nicholson, 'Nature and Function of Historical Argument', 164f). Once again, however, it seems probable that Henry's subjects were much less sensitive to foreign criticism.

2. Henrysone, Exhortacion, 218.



the reasons for employing Galfridian lore were quite compelling. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that the centrality of Constantine to Henrysone's historical perspective was founded also on the assertion, persistently reiterated, that 'he had al Britayn in possession':

wherunto whether he came by Helene his mother, or by Constancius his father forceth not much : for it suffiseth for our purpose, to prove yt al Britayn was under one Emperor, and beeyng under one Emperor then was Scotlande and Englande but one Empire.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, therefore, the empire of Constantine's successors, of Henry VIII and of Edward VI, was not merely English, it was British. Scotland too was incorporated in the imperial crown given statutory recognition in the Act in Restraint of Appeals and Scotsmen too could participate in the imperial and Protestant future which the breach with Rome inaugurated.

### III

In order to fix Scotland securely within the orbit of a British imperial crown, therefore, Henrysone had chosen to accept (and, indeed, to develop) the English historiographical tradition which both Mair and the medieval Scottish chroniclers had consistently rejected. To achieve his aim, he had not only endorsed the historicity of the Brutus legend and of the Romans' conquest of the whole island, but also of the English claim to superiority over Scotland 'so exactelie

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1. Ibid., 218.

set furthe' in Henry VIII's Declaration.<sup>1</sup> His purpose, however, was not so much to justify English suzerainty per se as to legitimate the concept of an imperial British realm and to highlight the consequently momentous historical import of the proposed marriage of Edward VI to Mary Queen of Scots. For through the marriage the English king would at last and without bloodshed gain 'his righteous possession of the whole monarchie of Britayn',<sup>2</sup> while the Scots would at last and peacefully gain access to a historically legitimate, but hitherto unrealized, imperial status. In Henrysone's eyes, indeed, the marriage would be a vindication of history, a final re-creation of the British realm 'as it was first, & yet still ought to be'.<sup>3</sup> It would, moreover, be the consummation of a grand providential - and emphatically Protestant - design. In concluding the Exhortacion, therefore, Henrysone has a personified 'Britain' ask rhetorically of her warring children:

Hath not the almighty providence severed me from the  
reste of the worlde, with a large sea, to make me one  
Islande? hath not natures ordinaunce furnished me  
with asmany thinges necessary, as any one ground  
bringeth furth? hath not mans pollicie at the begin-  
ning subdued me to one governoure? And hath not the  
grace of Christ illumined me over all, with one  
faith; and finally the workes of all these foure,  
tended to make me one? Why then wil you divide me  
in two?<sup>4</sup>

To do so, 'Britain' continues, is unnatural folly : neither birds nor beasts indulge in such parricide - neither, then, should reasonable men. Civil war leads only to destruction, as the examples of the

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1. Ibid., 225.

2. Ibid., 210.

3. Ibid., 234.

4. Ibid., 232.



Greeks, the Romans and so many other realms proclaim. Britain's problems have stemmed from the same internal discord. Consequently, she exhorts the Scots to seize the opportunity of 'this most honorable, most godly and profitable attonement with Englands' and thereby to share in the latter's 'concorde and unitie, her tranquillitie & quiet, her wealth & luckey fortune, her conquestes & triumphes : & finallie of all her incomparable ioyes & felicities'.<sup>1</sup> Above all, however, Henrysone has 'Britain' remind her Scottish brood:

how that by this calling of us into this unitie, proceeding plainly from god him selfe, he woulde also unite and ioyne us in one religion. For how godly were it, yt as these two Realmes should grow into one, so should thei also agre in the concorde & unite of one religion, & the same ye pure, syncere & incorrupt religion of Christ, setting a part all fond supersticions, sophistications, & other thousandes of devilries brought in by the bishop of Rome & his creatures, wherby to geve glosse to their thinges & darknes to Gods true worde ...<sup>2</sup>

The new Protestant and imperial British realm, therefore, inaugurated by a marriage arranged by divine providence, would usher in an era of peace, prosperity and godly concord: 'For beeyng then ... bothe under one kyng, the more large and ample the Empire we : the more honourable and glorious : the kyng of greater dominion, governance, power and fame : and the subiectes more rencumed, more happy and more quiet ...'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., 232-3. Henrysone's text for the Exhortacion as a whole is 'Omne regnum in se divisum desolabitur : that is to saie : every kingdom divided in it self, shalbe brought to desolacion' (ibid., 211ff).

2. Ibid., 234.

3. Ibid., 229.

As these quotations suggest, Henrysone tended to share Mair's view of the deficiencies of the Scottish polity in comparison with England and the consequent benefits to be derived from union with the latter in a new - or rather renewed - British realm. In fact, in a work written in 1548, he set out a programme of religious and social reforms designed to make good some of these deficiencies and to ensure the future well-being of his fellow countrymen within a reformed British framework.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Mair's, however, Henrysone's expectations possessed an intensity and sense of apocalyptic urgency deriving in part from the brutality of the wars of the 1540's but, more importantly, from his conviction that God had, 'in these latter daies, provided that blessed meane and remedy for the glorie of his name, and for our wealth and commoditie'.<sup>2</sup> Inexplicably, however, the Scots had so far chosen to spurn the providential 'meane and remedy' of a royal marriage and, despite successive defeats, had continued to defy England's military might. This was a state of affairs which by turns mystified and angered, not only Henrysone, but also the commander of the English armies himself. In 1548, Lord Protector Somerset addressed An Epistle Exhortatorie to the Scots which stressed still more than Henrysone's Exhortacion the providential nature of the opportunity being offered to them. Somerset argued, for example, that the deaths

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1. See 'The Godly and Golden Book', in Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots 1547-1603, ed. J. Bain and others (Edinburgh, 1898- ), 1, no.285, where Henrysone recommended a total of seventeen reforms, many of them concerned with establishing Protestantism in Scotland, but others advocating such reforms as the feuing of land on longer leases to improve the lot of the peasantry - a measure reminiscent of that suggested, as we have seen, by John Mair.

2. Henrysone, Exhortacion, 212.



of James V and his two male heirs in 1542, leaving the infant Mary as Queen of Scots, far from being a 'miracle' or the work of 'blynd fortune', was rather the work of God's 'infinite mercie and most inscrutable providence'.<sup>1</sup> Such an opportunity for uniting the realms had not occurred for eight hundred years and Somerset accordingly urged the Scots to accept the manifest will of God, 'to take the indifferent old name of Britaynes again', and 'to make of one Isle one realme, in love, amitie, concorde, peace, and charitie'.<sup>2</sup> After all, not only had God 'in maner called us bothe unto it', but union, as Henrysone had similarly emphasized, would have distinct advantages:

... we twoo beyng made one by amitie, be moste hable to defende us against all nacions : and havynge the sea for wall, the mutuall love for garrison, and God for defence, should make so noble and wel agreynge Monarchie, that neither in peace wee maie bee ashamed, nor in warre affraied, of any worldely or forrein power.<sup>3</sup>

To reap the benefits which perpetual peace under a British monarchy would inevitably bring, the Scots had only to break their useless alliance with France, repudiate the usurped authority of Rome, and reaffirm the validity of Queen Mary's betrothal to King Edward. Meanwhile, Somerset could only marvel that two peoples 'annexed and ioyned in one Island ... so like in maner, forme, language, and all condicions as we are' were nevertheless locked in 'mortall warre'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Somerset, An Epistle Exhortatorie, reprinted in The Complaynt of Scotlande, ed. Murray, 238-46, at 239-40.

2. Ibid., 241.

3. Ibid., 245.

4. Ibid., 239.

Yet was it so marvellous? Despite the prospect of peace and prosperity held forth by both Henrysone and Somerset, despite indeed the latter's guarantee that the marriage would not prejudice the particular laws and liberties of Scotland,<sup>1</sup> such offers were nonetheless made to the accompaniment of a threat of violent conquest. As Henrysone himself warned in the Exhortacion, Somerset approached 'with a puissant & invincible army', intent on befriending those who sought his 'mercy, grace & favour', but on punishing those who persisted 'in their stubborn & wilful disobedience'.<sup>2</sup> The Lord Protector put the matter still more succinctly, informing the recalcitrant Scots that 'you will not have peace, you will not have aliaunce, you will not have concorde : and conquest commeth upon you whether you will or no'.<sup>3</sup> Could Somerset's fair words be trusted any more than those of Henry VIII? Just as the claim to superiority was never far from Henry's mind, so Somerset insisted that, whatever the Scots did, that title could never be gainsaid.<sup>4</sup> Despite all protestations to the contrary, therefore, was it not clear that the ultimate objective was the subjugation of Scotland to the English crown, albeit under the pretence of a 'renewed' British monarchy? Among the Scots, such forebodings could

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1. See 'A Proclamatioun maid be the Protectour of England the tyme of the field of Pinkie', calendared in The Warrander Papers, ed. A. I. Cameron (S.H.S., 1931), i, 17; cf. Somerset, Epistle, 242. At the end of the Epistle, Somerset also offered Scottish merchants free trade with England provided they agreed 'to take parte with us, in this before named godly purpose' (ibid., 246).
  2. Henrysone, Exhortacion, 235.
  3. Somerset, Epistle, 244.
  4. Ibid., 242-3. Elsewhere, Somerset told the French that the English king's title to sovereignty over Scotland was evident in 'a great number of very antient and authentique writings' (see CSP Scot., i, no. 339).



only have been reinforced when they read a pamphlet such as Nicholas Bodrugan's An Epitome of the title that the Kynges Maiestie of Englande hath to the Sovereigntie of Scotlande, published in 1548. For here the author appealed to the Scots to stop fighting 'against the mother of their awne nacion : I meane this realme now called Englande the onely supreme seat of thempire of great Briteigne' and went on to 'prove', in still more detail than the Declaration, that Scotland had acknowledged English superiority from the days of Brutus and his sons.<sup>1</sup> However advantageous the marriage might have been to the Scots, in both military and ideological terms, the 'Rough Wooing' was prosecuted with a brash insensitivity to Scottish aspirations which, as we shall see, served only to impede the English cause.

In part this insensitivity indubitably stemmed from the heightening of religious tension as Protestant opinion spread through the English political establishment. Differences in confessional allegiance lent the war against Scotland - a war which for Henry VIII was little more than a dynastic power struggle - the character of a religious crusade for many of his officials. Indeed, even before the death of James V opened the way to union through marriage, it was already possible to underwrite and combine English aggression with the sanction of 'godly' propriety. Early in December 1542, for example, Lord Lisle (the future earl of Warwick and duke of Northumberland) suggested to Henry that he simply annex Scotland south of the Forth as it would be a 'godly acte ... to bring suche a soorte of people to the knowledge

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1. Bodrugan's Epitome is reprinted in abridged form in The Complaynt of Scotlande, ed. Murray, 247-53 (the quotation is from p.250).

of Godes lawes, the countrey soo necessarie to your domyneons'.<sup>1</sup> English ambitions could thus be informed and legitimated by Protestant zealotry and, just as the Scots were quick to label their schismatic neighbours 'heretics', so the distribution of a vernacular Bible in Scotland was seen by many as a prerequisite of union whether achieved by marriage or by force.<sup>2</sup> In such an atmosphere, moreover, it is not surprising that, when the opportunity of effecting a bloodless union through marriage presented itself, Protestants such as Henrysone and Somerset construed it as proceeding from the divine will. Both men, indeed, give the impression of participating in and being on the point of fulfilling a providential design of apocalyptic significance. The imputation of such cosmic and eschatological meaning to contemporary events was common enough in sixteenth century Europe and was further encouraged by Protestant reformers who viewed their attack on that prophesied Antichrist, the papacy, as occurring in the 'latter days' of the world and prefiguring the series of events which would shortly terminate in the Last Judgment.<sup>3</sup> There was, therefore, nothing unnatural either in construing the marriage of Mary to the 'godly' Edward VI as part of a divine plan to overthrow the powers of

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1. Hamilton Papers, i, no.255.

2. For descriptions of the English as heretics, see *ibid.*, i, nos. 41, 255; The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler, ed. A. Clifford (Edinburgh, 1809), i, 163, 169; and William Patten, The Expedition into Scotland [1548], reprinted in Fragments of Scottish History, ed. Dalrymple, 60. On the distribution of Bibles in Scotland, see Hamilton Papers, i, nos.209, 303, 316, 348.

3. On the medieval background to the application of sacred prophecy to mundane events, see Marjorie Reeves, The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages : A Study of Joachimism (Oxford, 1969). On the Protestant reformers' use of prophecy, see Richard Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse (Appleford, 1978), and Katharine R. Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain (Oxford, 1979).



darkness or in being dismayed at the Scots' apostasy in the face of such an imminent cataclysm. Furthermore, in eschatological terms, Henrysone's emphasis on the Emperor Constantine assumes still greater significance, for it was commonly held that the latter days would be dominated by a great Christian emperor, a godly prince modelled on Constantine the Great, who would be instrumental in destroying the kingdom of Antichrist.<sup>1</sup> Without ever explicitly casting Edward VI in such a role, Henrysone's clear call for a restoration of a Constantinian empire embracing both Scotland and England is redolent of apocalyptic meaning. It was a call, moreover, whose universal import was not to be stifled by paltry patriotic prejudice. If the Scots wished to save themselves from imminent destruction, they had at once to seize the providential opportunity of union in an imperial British realm strong enough to resist even the powerful forces of the kingdom of Antichrist.

#### IV

Nowhere perhaps is both the urgency and insensitivity with which the cause of union was advocated more evident than in William Patten's pamphlet The Expedition into Scotland. Published in 1548 in the wake of Somerset's crushing defeat of the Scots at Pinkie in 1547 and his

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1. On this point, see Arthur H. Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI : The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture (Edinburgh, 1979), esp. Ch.1. See also the same author's 'Scotland, Antichrist and the Invention of Great Britain', in New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland, ed. John Dwyer, Roger A. Mason and Alexander Murdoch (Edinburgh, 1982), 34-58.

subsequent occupation of the Lowlands, it is worth looking at as a final example of unionist propaganda. Patten was a Londoner who accompanied Somerset's invading army as an official (together with William Cecil, Elizabeth I's future secretary) of the Marshalsea court.<sup>1</sup> He wrote the Expedicion in diary form, adding an interesting preface to serve 'in stede of argument, for the matter of the storie ensuing'.<sup>2</sup> The preface begins by praising Somerset's 'valiaunce and wisdome' in all his dealings with the Scots and by describing him as sent by God to 'woorke his divine wyll'.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps as a consequence of this, Patten did not think it necessary to justify English aggression in any detail - he alluded only to 'the iust title of our Kynge unto Scotland, [and] the Scottes often deceites, untrueths of promyse, and periurie'.<sup>4</sup> - preferring instead to dilate in now familiar terms on the providential nature of the union which the Scots had thus far scorned:

whearby, like countreymen and countreymen, like frend & frend, nay, like broother and broother, we might in one perpetual and brotherly life, ioyn, love, & lyve together, accordynge as thearunto, bothe by the appointement of God at the firste, and by continuaunce of nature since, we seme to have bene made and ordeyned : seperate by seas from all oother nacions, in customes and condicions littell differinge, in shape and langage nothing at all.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Patten, Expedicion, 98.
  2. Ibid., v.
  3. Ibid., ix.
  4. Ibid., x-xi.
  5. Ibid., xiii.



The Scots, Patten continued in the same conventional vein, could not live 'lawles and hedles without a Prince' and who better for their queen to marry than Edward VI, 'a right Briton bred and borne' and virtuous to boot. Such a marriage, he assured the Scots, would mean 'not the mastership of you, but the felowship', for England wished not to conquer Scotland - although doubtless she could - but rather to free her from 'the fained frendship of Fraunce'. Not just from France, however, for England also, and most importantly, wanted to free Scotland 'from that most servile thraldome and bondage under that hydeous monster, that venomous Aspis and very Antichriste the Bisshop of Rome ...'<sup>1</sup> It was, moreover, Rome rather than France which Patten saw as the principal enemy and it was this perception which lent his desire for union apocalyptic urgency.

For Patten, still more than Henrysone, was possessed of that peculiarly Protestant exultation generated by the conviction that he was participating in the final battle with the forces of Antichrist in the latter days of the world. Nor, on the authority of Daniel and St. Paul, did he have any difficulty in identifying the pope himself as 'ye only antichrist'.<sup>2</sup> How prudent and providential, then, that England, 'not so much led by the samples of others ... as mooved by the mere mercie and grace of Almighty God', had cast off his usurped authority and 'most happely exterminate & banisht hym our bounds'. England, indeed, had reasserted her imperial status:

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1. Ibid., xv-xvii.

2. Ibid., xvii-xviii. Patten is careful to make clear that he is speaking not just of the present pope, 'but of him and his hole auncetrie of these many yeres paste'.

Whearby, as we have now ye grace to knowe and serve but one God, so are we subiect but to one Kynge; he naturally knoweth his owne people, & we obediently knowe hym our onely Soveraigne; hys Highnes estate brought and reduced from perdition, & in maner subieccion, unto the old princely, entyer, and absolute power again, and ours redemed from the doubt, to whome we shoulde obey.<sup>1</sup>

The Scots too could enjoy these godly blessings : they too could free themselves from popish ceremonies, from popish taxes and from popish jurisdiction. Indeed, if they did not, they would feel the full force of the wrath of God. More specifically, as the Bible aptly put it, so Patten warned the Scots that God would 'set out his vyneyard to oother good husbandes that wil yeld him frute in due times' and that 'the kingdome of God shalbe taken from you, & be geven to the nacion yt will do profit'.<sup>2</sup> If he did not actually go so far as to say that England would receive Scotland as a reward for her righteousness, clearly the idea would not have seemed outlandish to Patten. Meanwhile, he saw the Lord Protector's army as a meet instrument for inflicting God's plagues upon the Scots so long as they remained disobedient to His manifest will. For only thus - paradoxically enough - and with the help of His grace would the Scots come to realize:

whoo be your frendes, & whyther we will you well : wyth whoome, by soo many meanes sith God of good will hath so nie ioyned you, seme not you of frowardnes to seaver a sunder, agaynst the thyng that should be a generall wealth and common concorde, the provision of nature, and ordinaunce of God; and against his holy woord, which not at all unaptly, perchaunce, here may be cited : Quos Deus coniunxit, homo ne separet.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., xviii-xix.

2. Ibid., xix-xx.

3. Ibid., xxi.



In defying Somerset, therefore, the Scots were defying the will and the instrument of God. Under the influence of Protestantism, the union of Scotland and England in a new (or renewed) British imperial monarchy had become an apotheosis to be pursued with apocalyptic urgency.

Needless to say, such a unionist ideology was far removed from that promulgated by John Mair. To effect union and at the same time to further the Protestant faith, the Scots were now being asked to jettison the time-honoured belief in Scotland's original and continuing political autonomy and to accept rather her dependent status within a redefined British imperial framework. There was, moreover, no time to lose : the 'Edwardian moment'<sup>1</sup> - the providential opportunity to unite the realms without bloodshed - would quickly pass and Scotsmen had therefore to seize their chance without demur or face the terrible prospect of a wrathful God. The Scots, however, did demur : not only did they continue to resist both Henry VIII and Protector Somerset, but in 1548, after signing the Treaty of Haddington, they conveyed their queen to France and to an eventual French marriage. The Edwardian moment had passed. The barrage of unionist propaganda had failed to breach - perhaps, indeed, had merely strengthened - the Scots' traditional distrust of England and had failed to convince them that their future lay with Britain. Unionist ideology would continue to operate with profound effects on the Scottish mind throughout the sixteenth century and beyond, but in the 1540's it met with determined

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1. An apt phrase borrowed from the writings of Arthur Williamson; see for example his 'Scotland, Antichrist and the Invention of Great Britain', 39.

opposition. But how was that opposition articulated? How did the Scots respond to the ideological onslaught emanating from England? It is to just such questions that we must now turn our attention.



## Chapter Six

The Patriotic Response

## I

In 1549, William Lambe, parson of Conveth and a senator of the Scottish College of Justice, compiled a work which he entitled Ane Resonyng of ane Scottis and Inglis merchand betuix Rowand and Lionis &c. Although never published and, in fact, only recently discovered, Ane Resonyng provides a useful insight into how the propaganda emanating from the English court was received and answered in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, however, although it was intended as a reply to both Henry VIII's Declaration and Somerset's Epistle, it actually deals only with the former. At considerable length and with no little attention to detail, Lambe sought to deny point by point the validity of Henry VIII's justification of the war with Scotland. Not surprisingly, therefore, he was concerned above all with the English claim to feudal superiority over Scotland and the eighteen examples of Scottish kings doing homage to their English overlords as described in the Declaration. 'I intend', says the Scottish merchant to his English counterpart, 'to impung everie ane of thir pretendit homages be Polidor, zour awin liturate, autentik historiciane, and gife neid beis I sall impung be ane cuning, grave and diligent ancient air [= ?] callit Hectour Boece, our trew historiciane'.<sup>2</sup> Lambe invoked

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1. The MS (British Library, Cott. Calig. BVII, fos. 354<sup>r</sup>-375<sup>v</sup>) is currently being prepared for publication by Dr. R. J. Lyall of the University of Glasgow. I am most grateful to Dr. Lyall, not only for bringing it to my attention, but for allowing me to make use of his typescript copy of the original.

2. Ibid., fo. 361<sup>r</sup>.

the authority of Boece only sparingly, however, concentrating rather on pointing out the disparities between the Declaration and Polydore Vergil's Anglica Historia, a work which he designated the 'principall cronicle' of England and whose unusually sceptical approach to the extravagance of Galfridian historiography suited his purpose admirably.<sup>1</sup> With Polydore as his authority, Lambe was able to highlight the inaccuracies of the Declaration's shaky chronology as well as the inadequacies of the supporting evidence drawn from the instruments of homage and other judicial records which Henry had claimed were to be found in the English treasury. The validity of each example of homage impugned in this way, Lambe felt able to conclude that the general claim to superiority 'wantis na thing bot guid ground and veritie, and also sufficient probatioun'.<sup>2</sup>

If effective enough as an answer to the Declaration, however, Lambe's tediously legalistic exposition of his case was hardly calculated to stir the hearts of his fellow countrymen. Despite his reference to 'our trew historiciane' Hector Boece, he drew not at all on the emotive patriotic epos recounted in the Scotorum Historiae. When faced, for example, with the problem of Brutus and his progeny, Lambe chose to counter the English legend in terms reminiscent of John Mair rather than by recourse to the countervailing myth of Gathelus and Scota.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, however, the Resonyng was penned with only the

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1. Ibid., fo.366<sup>v</sup>. Cf. fo.362<sup>r</sup> where Lambe implies - not inaccurately - that Polydore's work was 'official' by virtue of the English government having obliged him to revise it, presumably according to their own wishes, before its publication in 1534.

2. Ibid., fo.373<sup>v</sup>.

3. Ibid., fos.361<sup>v</sup>-362<sup>r</sup>.



limited intention of refuting English pretensions in mind and it need not therefore surprise us that it made little use of the Scots' own evocative, but highly questionable version of their early history. After all, as a means of exposing the weaknesses in English arguments, Polydore Vergil was a much more telling weapon than Hector Boece. Nevertheless, what is perhaps somewhat more surprising is that there is no evidence to suggest that in the 1540's the Scots produced any literature which sought to offset the impact of unionist propaganda within Scotland by a deliberate appeal to the anti-unionist sentiments embodied in the native historiographical tradition. Indeed, there is only one other work extant from this period which made any contribution to the ideological debate over Scotland's past and present political status from an avowedly anti-unionist standpoint. The Complaynt of Scotland, however, despite its fiercely patriotic tone, eschews any reference to Boece, Bower or Fordun, while even its comments on unionist arguments are made only obliquely and in passing. Nevertheless, these last are not without interest and, although the Complaynt will be discussed in more detail shortly, it is worth examining this aspect of it in the present context.

Like the Resonyng, the Complaynt seems to have been written sometime in 1549, probably by Robert Wedderburn (?1510-?1553), the youngest of three Dundonian brothers, the other two of whom are well-known to Reformation historians for their work on the Gude and Godlie Ballatis.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For this ascription of the Complaynt to Wedderburn as well as further biographical information, see the editor's introduction to the Complaynt of Scotland, ed. A. M. Stewart (S.T.S., 1979), viii-xx. All subsequent references to the Complaynt are to this edition.

Notably, however, although far from satisfied with the state of the contemporary church, Robert Wedderburn did not follow his brothers into open opposition to Catholicism, preferring instead to retain his post as vicar of Dundee while voicing a desire for the rehabilitation rather than the outright destruction of the existing ecclesiastical system. He had little reason, therefore, to sympathize with the English cause on religious grounds and was accordingly not predisposed - any more than was the parson of Conveth - to see union as a necessary or desirable prelude to the triumph of Protestantism within Scotland. Equally, however, despite their religious conservatism, neither Wedderburn nor Lambe was particularly inclined to construe the wars of the 1540's as a struggle to maintain Scottish Catholic orthodoxy in the face of English Protestant heterodoxy. In fact, although there are (as mentioned previously) occasional references to English 'heretics' in contemporary Scottish records,<sup>1</sup> there is little to suggest that the Scots in general were tempted to view the Rough Wooing in spiritual rather than dynastic terms. However much the unionists stressed the importance of religion, to the majority of Scots confessional issues seem to have played only a minor part in what they interpreted essentially as a struggle over the sovereignty - or freedom - of their native realm. Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, the defence of Catholicism figures only peripherally in the highly patriotic, but basically secular rhetoric employed even by such a leading ecclesiastic as Cardinal David Beaton in an effort to rally opposition to English aggression. Similarly, both the Resonyng and the Complaynt

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1. See above, p.172.



are primarily concerned, not with the unionists' blatantly heretical religious opinions, but with the assumption of English lordship over Scotland on which the latter's vision of a Protestant and imperial British realm was predicated. Wedderburn, however, couched his arguments in much more general terms than did Lambe and it was perhaps for this reason that, despite the fact that by then the Anglo-Scottish war was over and the English were withdrawing from Scotland, the Complaynt was nevertheless published in Paris in 1550. In fact, in stark contrast to the Resonyng, Wedderburn's work is more a plea for the moral and spiritual reform of the Scottish estates than it is a refutation of English claims to superiority and it may still have seemed relevant enough to merit publication on these grounds even after the advent of peace. Certainly, whatever the exact reasons, Wedderburn did proceed with its publication and, although he tampered with his original text, his oblique references to English propaganda still provide valuable evidence of the Scottish reaction to the unionist ideology discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup>

In Wedderburn's case, that reaction was uncompromisingly and unashamedly hostile. The Complaynt was, for example, dedicated to Mary of Guise and in his 'Epistil to the Quenis Grace' the author lavished praise on the queen mother for her 'contemual avansing of the deffens of our cuntry' and for her 'heroyque vertu' - comparable to that of any heroine of antiquity - 'contrar the cruel wolfis of

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1. It is impossible to determine how much was deleted from the original text before it was published, but the lengthy, interesting, but entirely non-political 'Monologue Recreative' is almost certainly an interpolation designed to lend the work more wide-ranging appeal.

ingland'.<sup>1</sup> The dedication, moreover, sets the tone for the whole work and, in response to what he saw as unwarranted English aggression, Wedderburn urged the three estates of Scotland to take up arms in defence of their country's freedom. Nor was he in any doubt as to the justice of the cause, declaring that, since the death of James V, 'tha said ravisant wolfis of ingland hes intendit ane oniust weyr be ane sinister inventit false titil contrar our realme in hope to devoir the universal floc of our Scottis nation, and to extinct our generations furtht of remembrance'.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere, however, did Wedderburn attempt a detailed refutation of the claim to superiority as set out in the Declaration. Instead, he sought to cut the ground from beneath the feet of English kings by arguing that, far from having any claim to the throne of Scotland, they had no title to the sovereignty of even their own realm. English kings, he asserted, came of the 'false blude' of the Saxon invaders 'sergestes and engestes' [= ? Sergest and Hengist] who usurped the throne of 'the kyng of grit bertanze quhilk is now callit ingland' (i.e., it did not include Scotland) and 'trasonable banest the rytheus kyng and his posteritie fra the realme'. Since that time, England had been ruled by a series of 'tirran kyngis' who, having no 'rytht to the crone of ingland, ergo thai hef na titil to the crone of Scotland'.<sup>3</sup> For Wedderburn, the extent and horrors of the rule of these tyrant kings was amply and appositely illustrated by Henry VIII's 'onfaithful cruel act' against Wales and Ireland and he recommended that the fate of these countries under English

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1. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 1-2.

2. Ibid., 2.

3. Ibid., 67-8.



superiority 'suld be ane mirroure and ane exempil til al Scotland'.<sup>1</sup>  
 In case this failed to impress his countrymen, however, he also suggested that they bear in mind the suffering of their own ancestors under Edward I and warned that it was 'wondir probabil that inglisemen wil use this samyn cruelte on you al, gif sa beis that ze cum subiect to them'.<sup>2</sup>

As these arguments suggest, for Wedderburn as for many other contemporary Scots, the fear of subjugation to England far outweighed any of the potential benefits of union dwelt upon by writers such as Henrysone and Somerset. That Wedderburn had, in fact, read their or other similar works is clear from his reference to the 'inventit fablis contrar the iust verite' set out in a book by the 'orateurs of Ingland at there protectors instance'.<sup>3</sup> These fables, as he went on to reveal, were the legend of Brutus' conquest of the 'ile of bertan' and the prophecy of Merlin to the effect that Scotland and England would one day 'be baitht undir ane prince'. Wedderburn, however, made no further reference to Brutus, going on only to argue that, if Merlin's prophecy were to come true, it would be as a result of Scotland's conquest of England and not, as the English confidently chose to believe, vice versa.<sup>4</sup> These are, in fact, the only explicit references to unionist propaganda made in the Complaynt. Other passages, however, were clearly meant to counter the general tenor of its arguments. For example, whereas Henrysone, Somerset and Patten were

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1. Ibid., 74-5.

2. Ibid., 75-6.

3. Ibid., 64.

4. Ibid., 64-7.

at pains to point out the similarities in custom and language between the 'British' peoples as good grounds for union, Wedderburn contended that Scots and English were, nevertheless, temperamentally quite incompatible:

... there is nocht twa nations under the firmament that ar mair contrar and different fra uthirs, nor is inglis men and scottis men quhoubeit that thai be witht in ane ile and nythtbours, and of ane language : for inglis men ar subtil and scottis men ar facile, inglis men ar ambitius in prosperite and scottis men ar humain in prosperite, inglis men ar humil quhen thai ar subieckit be forse and violence, and scottis men ar furious quhen thai ar violently subieckit. inglis men ar cruel quhene thai get victorie, and scottis men ar merciful quhen thai get victorie. and to conclude it is onpossibil that scottis men and inglis men can remane in concord under ane monarche or ane prince be cause there naturis and conditions ar as indifferent as is the nature of scheip and wolvis.<sup>1</sup>

A marriage between sheep and wolves would patently not have the benign effects envisaged by the unionists and their contention that it was 'verray necessare for the weillfayre of ingland and scotland that baytht the realmis war coniunit to giddir' consequently made little impression on Wedderburn.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, moreover, the passage quoted above is spoken by Dame Scotia, the 'affligit lady' around whose exhortation to the three estates of Scotland the Complaynt is structured. Such a rhetorical device in itself presents a parallel with the figure of 'Britain' employed by both Henrysone and Bodrugan, a parallel which is still further strengthened when Dame Scotia, like Henrysone's 'Britain', accuses her children of committing unnatural

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1. Ibid., 83-4.

2. Ibid., 64.



parricide. In this case, however, it was not the Scots' belligerence towards England which was deemed unnatural, but rather their disinclination to defend their freedom. Even 'brutal beystis that hes na understanding of raison ... wil deffende ther nestis', argued Wedderburn, so 'natural men' should take up arms to defend their realm without any hesitation. As it was, the crime of parricide was being committed, not against 'Britain', but against Dame Scotia.<sup>1</sup> As such an argument makes abundantly clear, for Wedderburn at least, Scotland's continuing political autonomy easily took precedence over any dreams of an imperial British realm.

The writings of Lambe and Wedderburn do, therefore, give some indication of how the Scots responded to unionist ideology and attempted to counter its arguments. Both the Resonyng and the Complaynt were, however, written late in the 1540's and so far as is known no formal apologia for Scottish resistance to the idea of union survives from earlier in the decade. Frustrating as it is for the historian, there is no formal exposition of the basis of Scottish resistance to English aggression before 1549. Nevertheless, the absence of patriotic propaganda from this period by no means entails the absence of a patriotic ideology - it merely makes the latter more difficult to recover and reconstruct.<sup>2</sup> Such a reconstruction is possible, however,

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1. Ibid., 57-8. Cf. Henrysone, Exhortacion, reprinted in the Complaynt of Scotlande, ed. J. A. H. Murray (E.E.T.S., 1872), 207-36, at 232-3, and Bodrigan, Epitome, reprinted in *ibid.*, 247-56, at 255-6.

2. In characterizing those who opposed union as 'patriots' and their ideology as 'patriotic', I am aware of the danger of doing a great disservice to those (such as John Mair) for whom unionism and patriotism were clearly not incompatible. Nevertheless, such men were rare in the 1540's and throughout this chapter it has proved convenient to refer to the opponents of union in these admittedly somewhat loaded terms.

for alternative sources such as government records and contemporary correspondence do give us access to the language in which opposition both to naked English aggression and to the idea of union was articulated. Moreover, as we shall see, that language is readily identifiable with the traditional mode of discourse which, heavily charged with patriotic resonances, was inherited by Hector Boece and John Bellenden from the medieval period and latterly redeployed around the concept of the commonweal. In a sense, in fact, unlike the proponents of union, its Scottish opponents had no need to convince their countrymen of the justice of their cause by reasoned argument or to justify their use of, for example, unfamiliar 'British' terminology - in short, they had no need to construct or to explain a novel and contentious political ideology. On the contrary, anti-unionist sentiments were implicit in the normative language of the political community they sought to influence and as such to employ that language was to harness an ideology which was not only familiar, but which had motivated Scotsmen since the Wars of Independence. As we shall see, therefore, if the sources are neither as rich nor as explicit as in the case of unionism, the main elements of a patriotic ideology are nevertheless clearly discernible in the commonweal rhetoric employed by a wide variety of Scottish politicians throughout the 1540's.

## II

Not unexpectedly, at the heart of that ideology lay the essential conviction in Scotland's freedom from feudal overlordship. That in 1549 William Lambe still thought it worthwhile to refute in such detail the English claim to superiority is perhaps some indication of



how sensitive the Scots remained to this threat to their political autonomy. It was, after all, one which they had lived with for centuries and which had been denied many times before. The impatience and belligerence of Henry VIII, however, had reawakened all the old fears and his efforts in 1543, not just to effect the marriage between Mary and Edward, but to have the Scottish queen removed immediately to England, merely redoubled them. As early as March 1543, for example, Henry was warned that the Scots would not countenance such a move until Mary came of age because they believed his intention was not to provide 'for the weill of our soverane ladye' but rather 'to conqueise the realme'.<sup>1</sup> Even those who favoured the marriage and were prepared to aid Henry in that regard were adamant in their refusal to hand over the child queen.<sup>2</sup> Henry eventually gave way and the Treaty of Greenwich of July 1543 allowed for Mary to be brought up in Scotland until she had completed her tenth year. But this concession neither convinced the Scots of Henry's good-will nor allayed their fears of his ultimate intentions. In October of the same year, Ralph Sadler, Henry's ambassador in Scotland, reported to the English privy council that, regardless of the treaty, 'the whole body of the realm' favoured a French rather than an English marriage because the Scots believed that France would 'continue and maintain the honour and liberty of the realm' whereas England wanted 'nothing else but to bring them to subjection, and to have superiority and dominion over them'. Indeed, Sadler continued, although some of the assured lords

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1. The Hamilton Papers, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh, 1890-2), i, no. 337.

2. See, for example, *ibid.*, i, no. 404, ii, no. 113; see also The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler, ed. A. Clifford (Edinburgh, 1809), i, 163, 169.

might accept Henry's superiority, 'there is not one of them that hath two servants or friends that is of the same mind, or that would take their parts in that behalf'.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, the apparently rather bemused ambassador assured his superiors that the problem was simply 'that this nation is of such malicious nature towards Englishmen, that they cannot abide, nor suffer to hear, that Englishmen should have any manner of superiority or dominion over them'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Sir George Douglas, one of the leaders of the Anglophile party, had made clear to him, the Scots would 'dye rather all in a daye, then they wolde be made thrall and subject to England' and if Henry wanted obedience he had no alternative 'but to gett it with the swoorde'.<sup>3</sup>

It was widely believed, however, that the use of force would simply stiffen Scottish resistance and make a bad situation worse. As the Scottish governor, the earl of Arran, warned Henry: 'the bringing-in of 5000 Englishmen should cause 20000 Scotsmen to forsake them [i.e., the Anglophile party], and run to their enemies'.<sup>4</sup> Sir George Douglas reinforced this view, stating bluntly that any attempt 'to bring the government of this realm to the king of England' by violent means would meet with universal resistance:

there is not so little a boy but he will hurl stones against it, and the wives will handle their distaffs, and the commons universally will rather die in it, yea, and many noblemen and all the clergy be fully against.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Sadler Papers, i, 326-7; Sadler repeated this warning a few days later in a letter to Henry VIII (see Hamilton Papers, ii, no.85).

2. Sadler Papers, i, 259.

3. Hamilton Papers, i, no.350.

4. Sadler Papers, i, 255.

5. *Ibid.*, i, 70.



Such a view is certainly exaggerated, but it is still hard to doubt that in 1543 Scottish hostility towards England was not only widespread and deep-rooted but had reached a pitch comparable to the xenophobia evident in Hary's Wallace. This is amply documented in the quite invaluable, if somewhat paranoid dispatches of the beleaguered and clearly terrified Ralph Sadler. Himself and his servants shot at in his garden in Edinburgh, one servant beaten up as an 'English dog' by an irate Scot, and his own life threatened by enraged Edinburgh burgesses, Sadler should perhaps be forgiven his frequent references to the 'malice' of the Scots and even for concluding that 'under the soonne lyve not more beestely and unreasonable people then here be of all degrees'.<sup>1</sup> The Scots, however, did not confine their malice to Sadler : they were equally hostile to those of their own countrymen who were pledged to support his master's cause. Sadler reported that the so-called 'English lords' had 'almost lost the hearts of the common people' and that 'such ballads and songs [were] made of them, how the English angels had corrupted them, as have not been heard'.<sup>2</sup> Arran, for example, was said to be not only 'an heretick' - as we have seen, a jibe often used to insult the schismatic English - but also 'a good Englishman' who 'hath sold this realm to the king's majesty'.<sup>3</sup> The earl of Angus and his supporters were similarly reputed 'good Englysshe men', while of Angus himself Sadler wrote 'it is universally

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1. See *ibid.*, i, 237, and Hamilton Papers, ii, nos. 2, 14, 27.

2. Sadler Papers, i, 165-6. Unfortunately, neither these 'ballads and songs' nor the 'sclanderous billis, wittingis, ballatis and bukis' mentioned in the Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501-1554, ed. R. K. Hannay (Edinburgh, 1932), 527-8, have survived.

3. Sadler Papers, i, 216; cf. *ibid.*, i, 234.

spoken that he hath rendred his house to Englisshe men, for the which they do moche deteste him. Such is the malice of this nacion towardes Englonde!<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, Sadler was both a frightened and a prejudiced observer, but that Scottish fears of subjugation were translated in 1542-3 into near hysterical Anglophobia seems incontestable.

As in the middle ages, however, if patriotic feeling often issued negatively - albeit understandably - in vilification of the English, it also once again found more positive expression in the vocabulary of freedom. Popularized, as we have seen, in works such as John Barbour's Bruce, the idea of freedom resonated profoundly in the minds of the medieval political community. Equally, early in the sixteenth century, it was in similar terms that Hector Boece and John Bellenden had protested the unimpeachable autonomy of the realm throughout its long and noble history. Not surprisingly, therefore, when confronted with a revival of the English claim to superiority in the 1540's, the Scots expressed their reservations and opposition in the same familiar, but highly evocative terminology. Thus, early in 1543, when the idea of treaties of peace and marriage with England was first mooted, the Scottish parliament firmly instructed its ambassadors that it was 'desirit for the part of Scotland that the realme stand in the awin libertie and fredomes as it is now and hes bene in all tymes bigane' and that, even should a dynastic union come about, 'this realme sall evir haif and beir the name of Scotland and to broke the auld libertie privileges and fredomes in all estatiss as it hes bene in all tymes

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1. Hamilton Papers, ii, nos.99, 120.



bigane....'<sup>1</sup> Such guarantees were in fact incorporated in the Treaty of Greenwich but, unconvinced by any English assurances, when the Scottish parliament later repudiated the treaty, it also reaffirmed the alliance with France in the hope that she would give 'ayd and supple' to Scotland 'for the defence of the samyn and liberte thair of aganis the king of Ingland quha actually invadis the samyn'.<sup>2</sup> Similar language is employed in official documents throughout the 1540's. Later in the decade, for example, in the Treaty of Haddington with France signed in July 1548, we find an almost exact repetition of the terms of the Treaty of Greenwich. The French agreed to defend the realm and keep it in 'libertie and fredome' and, in the event of a marriage between Mary and the dauphin, to maintain the realm and lieges 'in the samin fredome liberteis & Lawis as hes bene in all kingis of Scotlandis tymes bypast ...'.<sup>3</sup> Finally, two years later, in a rather grovelling letter to the French king, the Scottish privy council thanked him effusively for restoring 'the auld libertie and fredom' of the realm, for delivering it 'furth of the thraldome in the quhilk it wes for the tyme', and for thus saving it from 'perpetuale subjection'.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the idea of freedom was not only still prominent in the public discourse of the political community, but it was also still capable of articulating its belief in its historic and continuing

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1. The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, ed. T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814-75), ii, 412.

2. *Ibid.*, ii, 432.

3. *Ibid.*, ii, 481.

4. The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, ed. J. H. Burton and others (Edinburgh, 1877- ), i, 86-7.

autonomy. Just as in 1548 the lords of council referred to the raising of an army 'for expulsoun of auld enemyis and to putt this realm to fredome', so after the signing of the Treaty of Greenwich in 1543 Cardinal Beaton raised the people 'for the defence of the faith and holy church, and also for the preservation of the liberty and freedom of the realm'.<sup>1</sup> Other high-ranking Scots, with varying degrees of sincerity, were equally prompt to adopt the same mode of discourse. Arran, for example, repeatedly assured Henry VIII that he would do everything he could for him 'not offending the liberty and freedom of this realm', while the earls of Argyll and Moray made a similar assurance 'not offending their duty of allegiance unto their sovereign lady, and the liberty and freedom of the realm'.<sup>2</sup> Rhetoric such as this was well suited to harnessing the patriotic fervour of Scots who, like the servants of the earl of Angus, were prepared to desert their master should either he or the governor incline too much to England: 'Openlie bruting that they bee Scottishemen, and trew Scottes they wolbee in harte and dede against Englande, what covenante, pacte, or other promyse soever bee made to the contrarie by their governour and his adherents'.<sup>3</sup> The freedom of their realm was an idea to which many Scots in the 1540's - like their medieval predecessors - responded with enthusiasm and alacrity. As in past centuries, it provided an effective and emotive riposte to both English aggression and the threat of domination through union on unfavourable terms.

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1. Acts of Council (Public Affairs), 575; Sadler Papers, i, 234.

2. Hamilton Papers, i, no.356; Sadler Papers, i, 126, 169.

3. Hamilton Papers, i, no.397.



The vocabulary of freedom in which Scottish resistance was most commonly expressed, however, had undergone one small but significant change since the days of Fordun and Barbour. As was suggested in a previous chapter, in the two decades preceding 1540 Scottish political discourse had been immeasurably strengthened and enriched by the emergence of the word 'commonweal' to a position of prominence within it.<sup>1</sup> A term both flexible and evocative, it could be employed by John Bellenden, for example, not only to focus and conceptualize the community's patriotic aspirations but also to convey a particular set of expectations of kingship. Indeed, in the figure of the prince, the primary connotations of the commonweal - the defence of the realm and the administration of justice within it - were combined and coalesced. In the 1540's, therefore, in the context of a struggle to maintain Scotland's autonomy symbolized by the fate of the reigning monarch, the 'commonweal of the realm' was a phrase whose multiple shades of meaning were a particularly powerful weapon in the hands of the patriot party. While by no means replacing freedom in their vocabulary - more often than not, indeed, it is used in conjunction with it - to invoke the commonweal was at once both to assume a belief in Scotland's political independence and to help focus it more clearly on the figure of the monarch.

No one, it seems, was more sensitive to the potent connotations of the commonweal in contemporary discourse than Cardinal David Beaton, the leader of the opposition to the Treaty of Greenwich who managed to detach the governor from the Anglophile party in September 1543 and to

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1. See above, pp.67ff.

orchestrate the rejection of the treaty three months later.<sup>1</sup> According to Sadler, for example, the cardinal and his party were willing to support Henry VIII 'in all thingis reasonable standing with the honour and suretie of their sovereyng ladie and thonour lybertie and common wealthe of her realm'. 'Which woordes of qualification', Sadler added significantly enough, 'they used alwayes; but what exposition they wooll make of the same I cannot tell'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, however, the 'exposition' was not far to seek. On 24 July 1543, Beaton and many of his most prominent supporters had put their names to a 'Secret Band', the text of which Sadler had himself conveyed to Henry VIII and which gives a clear indication of how the cardinal's party's commitment to the commonweal was to be construed.<sup>3</sup> The 'Band' begins, for example, with the assurance that the signatories are 'faythfull and trew subjectes to the quenis grace our sowerne lady, haiffand zeale to justice and the just administracion and exercision tharof, and als to the common weill of this realme and liberte and honour of the samyn'. It then goes on to stress how 'the gret affaris of this realme has bene ewel tretyt' since the death of James V, how 'thar is no maner of pollesy nor justice usit nor exercist within this realm', and how 'the gret besynes' between Scotland and England is being handled by 'prevat and suspek personis, haiffand na concedirasyon of

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1. For biographical details, see John Herkless and R. K. Hannay, The Archbishops of St. Andrews (Edinburgh, 1907-15), iv, passim.

2. Hamilton Papers, ii, no.38; cf. ibid., i, no.425, where Sadler reported that Beaton and his friends were concerned with 'the suretie of their quene and maystres, and the common weale of the realme, which they alledged that they onlie sought and nothing ells'.

3. For the full text of the 'Band', see ibid., i, no.446.



the common weille, but to thar awn particular profyt'. As a result, it concludes, Scotland is 'in gret danger to be subdewit till our auld enymyis of Ingland' and there is a general fear that 'our said soveran lady ... suld be transportit and haldyn in Ingland, to the hie dishonour, perpetuall skaith, dammage, and reuyn of the libertie and nobilnes of this realm'. Without explicitly saying that their objective was to keep the queen within Scotland, the signatories therefore pledged - 'with our kyn and frendis, servandis, vassalis, tenentis, part takkers, and assistars' - to 'convene and assist all to gydder ... in all and syndry matteris and affairis concernyng the common wele and lybertie of this realme'.

Although bonds of manrent were a common feature of sixteenth century Scottish society, this 'Secret Band' was one of the earliest to be entered into for overtly political purposes.<sup>1</sup> More important in the present context, however, is the fact that in relatively short compass it successfully conveys all the emotive connotations we have already associated with the concept of the commonweal. That is, it is not only, at its most literal, juxtaposed with 'particular profit', but also closely associated with the administration of justice and the defence of the realm. Moreover, these two functions - the main activities of any contemporary monarch - are stressed in the context of grave fears for the safety of the queen and the implied intention not

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1. Such bonds were, however, rapidly to become an important feature of Reformation politics and to acquire (as we shall see) markedly religious connotations. For the general background to bonding, see Jennifer M. Brown, 'Bonds of Manrent in Scotland before 1603', Unpubl. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1974,

to let her fall into English hands. As Beaton clearly saw, the idea of the commonweal, neatly encapsulating both the freedom of the realm and the exercise of justice within it, was symbolized by and derived its dynamism from the person of the prince. It was surely no coincidence, therefore, that the first action taken by the cardinal's party after Arran defected to them in September 1543 was to crown the infant Mary in a hurried ceremony at Stirling.<sup>1</sup> As the ultimate source of justice as well as the living embodiment of the freedom of the realm, the reigning monarch - however young - provided the most potent rallying-point available to the patriotic party. Both symbol and source of the commonweal of the realm, Mary (or those who controlled and manipulated her) could harness all the fears and prejudices of those Scots who vowed that 'they had rather all dye or they wolde be under any other king then one of there owne'.<sup>2</sup> Beaton, indeed, had succeeded not only in gaining control of the queen but also in legitimating his actions in terms of the most powerful language available to the Scottish political community in the sixteenth century. It was a combination which his Anglophile opponents, however sophisticated the unionist ideology at their disposal, found it impossible to counter.

There is, in fact, no better testimony either to the dominance of commonweal discourse in contemporary Scotland or to Beaton's successful use of it than the fact that the 'English' lords tried not only to employ it on their own behalf but also to discredit the cardinal in

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1. See Hamilton Papers, ii, nos.26, 30.

2. Ibid., i, no.404.



the exact same terms. With notable shrewdness, for example, the English privy council advised the assured lords to issue a proclamation arguing that the cardinal and his party were traitors bent only on delivering Mary into French hands, while they themselves:

having respect of their dyeutie of alleageaunce,  
and myndeng the defence of their yong maistres  
person and the preservacion of the common welth  
of the realme, have thought convenyent to do what  
they can to redeme the sayd princesse to sauf-  
garde and libertie out of thandes of those trai-  
tours the Cardinales and their faccion, who  
seake nothing els but the destruccion both of  
the yong Quene and all the rest of that realme,  
to have their oune glory and pompe borne up and  
entreteyned.<sup>1</sup>

This was an astute manoeuvre which, if successful, would have completely turned the tables on Beaton, casting him in the role of traitor while the assured lords assumed the part of patriotism. It was, moreover, a ploy which (as we shall see in a later chapter) was attempted yet again in the not dissimilar circumstances of the Reformation crisis of 1559. In 1543, however, it was doomed to failure. Suspicions of the assured lords' ultimate allegiance and intentions were far too strong for them to gain much political capital from this type of patriotic rhetoric. Their association with Henry VIII had damaged their credibility beyond repair and it was impossible for them plausibly to justify their actions in terms of the commonweal so long as it was generally believed, not only that they were pensioners of England, but that they upheld the English king's claim to lordship over Scotland. Given its stress on the freedom of the realm, the internal logic and assumptions of commonweal discourse made such a stance as untenable as it

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1. Ibid., ii, no.75.

was contradictory. Not surprisingly, therefore, the assured lords' appeal fell on deaf ears while Beaton continued to reap the enormous benefits to be derived from legitimating his activities in terms of the commonweal and liberty of the realm.

The cardinal, however, was not the only beneficiary of the powerful influence which such patriotic rhetoric exerted over the Scottish political community. As James V's widow and the mother of the queen, Mary of Guise was equally well placed to garner the harvest of goodwill which it nurtured. Even her French origins and connections proved no disability in the Anglophobic atmosphere of the 1540's and, throughout the decade, she remained a natural focus for patriotic feeling. In the face of the English invasion of 1544, for example, several border lairds swore loyalty to her and her child and, in terms which are by now all too familiar, vowed to defend the realm and its liberties from foreign encroachment. Walter Kerr of Cessford, for example, assured her that he would be 'ane trewe Scottis man' and fight 'for defens and weill of the realme'; Walter Scott of Buccleuch pledged his support in all that was done 'conserning the commonweltht and liberte of this realm'; while George Lord Hume wrote, 'let us nocht think to tyne [= lose] sa noble ane realme to our ennymeis that our foirbearis hes sa lang kepit and defendit', and assured the dowager that he and his kin 'salbe trew Scottis men and never consent to the desyre of our ennymeis'.<sup>1</sup> The same patriotic idiom was, in fact,

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1. The Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine, ed. A. I. Cameron (S.H.S., 1927), 79-80, 84, 86-7. Interestingly, Lord Hume and his sons were provided with French pensions in 1549 for services in 'defens of this realm' and in 'besyness concernyng the commune weill and liberte' of the realm (see Acts of Council [Public Affairs], 589-90).



employed by a wide range of the dowager's correspondents in the 1540's : the earl of Moray, for example, wrote expressing his loyalty and willingness to defend 'the weill of this realme and liberte'; Lord Methven wrote of how one of her erstwhile opponents was now willing to 'do his haill power to the wele of our soverane lady and the common weill of this realm'; and even Sir George Douglas thought it worthwhile to insist on his willingness to serve her 'according to your honour and the common welth of this reaulme'.<sup>1</sup> As the mother of the infant queen, Mary of Guise was a natural beneficiary of the patriotic conservatism generated by commonweal rhetoric. So long as the Scots feared England more than France, the dominant mode of political discourse worked entirely to her and her child's advantage. As we shall see, it was only in the later 1550's, when her ties with France seemed more threatening to the commonweal and liberty of the realm than those of her opponents with England, that the normative language of Scottish politics could be plausibly - although not in fact successfully - employed against her.

### III

The foregoing analysis of the language in which the Scots articulated their opposition to both union and English aggression clearly reveals their commitment to that ideology of patriotic conservatism which we have seen to be characteristic of Scottish political thought in the early sixteenth century. We can say with some assurance, therefore, that implicit in the politicians' rhetorical appeals to the

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1. Mary of Lorraine Corresp., 50, 234, 85.

commonweal and liberty of the realm lay basic assumptions about the status and governance of the kingdom which were not only widely shared by the political community at large, but which were also fundamentally at variance with the British 'imperialism' of unionist ideology. In the light of this, it is worth turning once again to Robert Wedderburn's Complaynt of Scotland, for the importance of this work lies not so much in its unique status as a published response to unionist propaganda as in the fact that it too is couched largely in the language of the commonweal. Indeed, like Boece's Scotorum Historiae, the Complaynt is essentially an appeal to the Scots to preserve the commonweal and liberty of the realm by emulating the virtuous manners of their renowned ancestors. In Wedderburn's case, however, the situation was made critical and the appeal more strident by the brute reality of foreign invasion and occupation of his native land. Consequently, an assessment and analysis of the Complaynt may well begin with an examination of its author's view of the suffering inflicted on Scotland in the course of the wars of the 1540's.

In fact, this is conveniently and graphically illustrated by Wedderburn's detailed depiction of Dame Scotia, that 'ladye of excellent extractione and of anciant genolygie' whose exhortation to the three estates forms the core of the Complaynt. When, for example, she appeared to the author in his sleep, her 'woful contenens' testified at once to 'the grite violens that sche had sustenit & indurit'. Her hair was 'feltrit & trachlit'; her golden crown was 'lyik to fal doune fra hyr hede'; and, on her shield, the red lion rampant was 'hurt in mony placis of his body'. Above all, however, her mantle, on which were embroidered the signs and emblems of the three estates



of Scotland, 'was revyn & raggit mony placis that skantly mycht i persave the storeis ande figuris that hed bene gravit, wrocht, and brodrut in ald tymis in the thre partis of it'.<sup>1</sup> In the first part of the mantle, the shields and harness of the nobility were 'brokyn ande roustit'; in the second, the works of the clergy were so obliterated that 'na man culd extract ony profitabil sentens nor gude exampil furtht of ony part of it'; while the third part had so deteriorated that:

it aperit that al the grene treis, cornis, besti-  
alite, mecanyc craftis, and schips, ande merchan-  
dreise, that hed bene curioslye wrocht in ald  
tymis in the bordour ... was split and distroyit,  
and the eird was becum barran & stirril, and that  
na ordinaunce of policye culd be persavit in it,  
nor esperance of releif.<sup>2</sup>

Such, in Wedderburn's view, was the parlous state to which Scotland had been reduced in the course of the 1540's. Moreover, the impression of desolation is still further reinforced when Dame Scotia, lamenting her sorrowful condition, sees approaching her 'thre of hyr auen native natural sonnys'. For the eldest of these 'was in harnes, traland ane halbert behynd hym, beand al affrayit ande fleyit for dreddour of his lyve'; the second 'was sittand in ane chair ... kepand grite gravite, haffand ane beuk in his hand, the glaspis war fast lokkyt witht rouste'; while the youngest was lying on the cold earth, his clothes torn and ragged, 'makand ane dolorus lamentatione, and ane piteouse complaynt'.<sup>3</sup> The three estates of Scotland had, according to

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1. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 54-5.

2. Ibid., 55.

3. Ibid., 55-6.

Wedderburn, been decimated and demoralized by the events of the 1540's. Yet he went on to construe this, not sympathetically in terms of external forces over which his countrymen had no control, but rather critically in terms of their own moral weaknesses.

Wedderburn believed, in fact, that the Scots were suffering the punishment of God as a reward for their sins and wickedness. Consequently, he identified the 'thre vehement plagis' which afflicted them - war, pestilence and dissension among the three estates - with those described in Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Isaiah, and called on his countrymen to repent of their evil ways.<sup>1</sup> If such plagues were the result of disobedience to God's commands, however, Wedderburn was quick to make clear that that disobedience had itself proceeded 'of ane warldly affectione and cupidite that we have toward the vile corruption of this warld that the scriptour callis mammon'.<sup>2</sup> He then went on to argue that the present world, far from being composed of the four elements - earth, water, air and fire - of God's creation, was made up rather of the seven [sic] vices controlled by Satan: 'that is to say, avareise, ambitione, luxure, cruallte, dissait, onfaythfulnes, disimulatione & insaciabil cupidite'. Moreover, it was the over-abundance of these vices within Scotland which had caused 'the calamite that it induris'. The Scots' devotion to the pleasures of the flesh, their avarice, ambition and cupidity, had led them to

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1. Ibid., lff. In this regard, the Complaynt assumes on occasions a markedly apocalyptic tone which we will discuss further in the following chapter, but which does not materially affect either Wedderburn's diagnosis of Scotland's ills or the conventional remedy which he prescribes for them.

2. Ibid., 25.



renounce the virtues of liberality, temperance, patience and humility and was the root cause of their present predicament.<sup>1</sup> As Dame Scotia told her sons, they were 'ignorant abusit and dissaitful pepil, gone by the pathe way of vertecouse knowlage, beand of ane effeminat courage, degradit fra honour, and degenerit fra the nobilite of zour foir fadirs & predecessours'.<sup>2</sup> Much worse, Dame Scotia continued, their weaknesses were being exploited by the English, whose offers of 'gold, silvyr and gret promessis of heretagis' the corrupt Scots too readily accepted. Such treachery merely compounded the division and dissension which already existed among the three estates and left the realm an easy prey to conquest. Dame Scotia therefore implored her children to 'expel hatrent, divisione & avaricius lyfffyng furtht of zour hartis' and 'to remembir of the nobil actis of zour foir fathers & predecessours' who, as the chronicles made clear, had 'brocht the realme be wisdome & manhede in sykker pace quhou beit thai war onequal baytth in nummer & puissance to zour ald enemes'. For only thus, when 'discentione, sedetione and avricius lyfffyng' were removed, would 'gude pollycie' prevail and the kingdom 'increse in gloir, honour, riches and dreddor to zour enemes'.<sup>3</sup>

The parallel between this diagnosis of Scotland's ills and that put forward twenty years earlier by Boece and Bellenden need hardly be laboured. In both cases a conventional ethical frame of reference is employed and in both cases it is argued that the corrupted virtue

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1. Ibid., 26-7.

2. Ibid., 56-7.

3. Ibid., 70-1.

of the Scots represents a threat to the stability and survival of the realm. Nevertheless, it is a parallel rather than a direct borrowing, for although in both instances Scotland is characterized as a polity of manners, there is no evidence that Wedderburn was conversant with Boece's History. Despite being over-burdened with historical exempla and despite frequent but unspecific references to the example of virtuous forbears, the Complaynt draws its illustrative material from biblical and particularly classical sources and refers hardly at all to Scottish history. There is, however, no need to posit any direct indebtedness to Boece, for the Complaynt is clearly couched in terms which, although best exemplified in the Scotorum Historiae, were generally available to and widely employed by the sixteenth century Scottish political community at large. In other words, Wedderburn was simply making use of that same language of the commonweal in which contemporary Scots habitually described and discussed their political experiences. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that the idea of the commonweal itself played a crucial role in Wedderburn's thinking. Indeed, as we shall see, inspired by classical ideals of patriotism and public service, the commonweal was for Wedderburn both the obvious test and the ultimate end of virtuous citizenship.

This is most clearly revealed in Wedderburn's constant preoccupation with his countrymen's selfish avarice. Such a concern - conventional enough in the medieval literature of complaint - was greatly intensified in Wedderburn's mind by his fear that many of his compatriots were being induced to betray their native land by English offers of land and money. Accordingly, therefore, he exhorted them to 'detest avarice, ambition and treason' and, employing the familiar



juxtaposition, to place 'the deffens of zour comont weil' above the pursuit of 'zour particular weil'. Banal as this advice may sound, it was for Wedderburn much more than a hackneyed cliché. For, as he informed his selfish countrymen:

quhen zour particular weil is spulzeit or hurt be zour enemeis it maye be remedit be zour comont weil. Ande in opposit, gyf zour comont weil be distroyt than it sal nevyr be remedit be zour particular weil, for zour particular weil is bot ane accessor of zour comont weil and the accessor followis the natur of the prencipal ...<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, for Wedderburn, the commonweal was not only more important than any of the individuals who composed it, but its defence was the highest duty incumbent upon those individuals. Indeed, following Cicero - his favourite classical source - he elevated its defence to the status of a natural law. Explicitly citing Cicero, for example, he had Dame Scotia remind her children that 'natur hes oblist zou til avance the salute and deffens of zour public weil' and that those who damage 'the public weil ... deserve as grite reproche as tha hed sel-lit treasonablye the realme to there enemeis'. Here, in fact, as elsewhere in the Complaynt, the idea of the commonweal is lent additional resonance by its close - at times, indistinguishable - association with the patria. Thus Dame Scotia tells her children that 'the natural love of zour cuntre suld be inseperablye rutit in zour hartis' and goes on to argue that to neglect its defence - or commonweal - is similarly to infringe an ordinance of nature:

I maye say and conferme be raison, that al pepil ar disnaturalit fra there gude nature, quhilkis in necessite enforsis them nocht at there power, to

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1. Ibid., 88.

purches & til avance the public weil of there native cuntre, it beand destitut of supple & desolat throucht grite persecutions of mortal enemeis. For thai that wil nocht expose there bodeis and gudis to perrel and dangeir for the iust deffens of there honour, lyvis, frendis and gudis : bot rather wil thole them selvis, ther public weil, & ther native cuntre to perreis al to gydder, thai ar mair brutal nor brutal beystis.

According to Wedderburn, therefore, those Scots whose avarice and ambition outweighed their love of Scotland, who subordinated the common good to the pursuit of their own 'particular weil', were 'mair disnaturellit' than 'brutal beystis that hes na undirstanding of reason'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he clearly believed that the patria could only be saved from foreign occupation by virtuous citizens dedicated to the promotion of the commonweal of the realm and prepared to sacrifice their lives in its pursuit. Unfortunately, however, in Wedderburn's view, when measured against such classical ideals of patriotism and public service, all three of the estates of Scotland were seen to fall far short. As he saw it, the corrupt and avaricious manners of the Scots were destroying the commonweal from within, while leaving the patria vulnerable to conquest from without.

Yet from this general indictment of Scottish morals, Wedderburn does at first seem prepared to excuse the third estate 'callit Laubir'. Alone of Dame Scotia's sons, the youngest is allowed to answer her

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1. Ibid., 57-8. The marginal citations which accompany these arguments in the Complaynt consist of three brief quotations from Cicero. Remarking on the fact that the work as a whole contains thirty quotations from the Roman, the Complaynt's editor says that Wedderburn 'seems to be quoting from memory or "ad sensum"', a sign perhaps that he was fairly familiar with his writings (ibid., xxvii).



charge of treasonable self-interest at considerable length and with arguments which deserve some comment. The first of these is that the 'lauberaris of the grond' are so oppressed by the other two estates that they have nothing left to contribute to the war effort. Laubir, in fact, considers the nobility and clergy to be greater enemies to the common people than the English themselves and goes on to broaden the scope of the debate by lamenting that there is no institution, such as the Roman tribunate, to defend 'the fredum and liberte of the comont pepil contrar the crualte of the hie senat or any uthir grit man of grit stait'.<sup>1</sup> Pursuing this general line of argument, Wedderburn then has Laubir utter the common egalitarian argument that, despite the unmerciful tyranny used towards him by his so-called elder brothers, he is in fact the eldest, for from 'pure lauberaris' all other estates were originally derived. Consequently, he advises his brothers to remember that they, like he, are descendants of 'the successouris of ouer foir father Adam, quhilkis war lauberaris of the grond' and that, for all their titles of nobility, their blood is no different from that 'of ane plebien or of ane mecanik craftis man'.<sup>2</sup> Finally, returning to Dame Scotia's accusation, Laubir attempts to exculpate himself from the charge of treason on the general grounds that the common people 'have nothir tyme, oportunitie, reches, credens, hardynes, prudens, nor familiarite witht ane prince' to enable them to commit such a crime. The only action the common people can take against an evil prince, he argues, is to pray for his decease and to murmur against him 'quhen he gouernis nocht weil the realme witht

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1. Ibid., 97-8.

2. Ibid., 100-2.

iustice and puneissis transgressouris'.<sup>1</sup> As for the specific charge of assuring with England, Laubir argues that this cannot be considered treason as the commons, deserted by the nobility and clergy and unable to defend themselves, had had no choice. Nevertheless, he goes on, if 'my twa brethir passis in gude ordour to resist the invasions of our ald enemeis, it sal be maid manifest that the pure comontis that ar assurit of Inglis men ... sal preif as gude Scottis men efter qualite as ony Scottis man of Scotland that was nevyr assurit'. That said, Laubir concludes by protesting to Dame Scotia that he is 'innocent of they accusation' and that the remedy for her affliction 'lyis nocht in my possibilite'.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that Wedderburn allowed the third estate so much space to develop these arguments may suggest that he felt they contained some substance. Certainly, he did not subsequently deny that the commons were oppressed by an avaricious nobility and clergy. He did, however, argue that, no matter how justifiable Laubir's charges against the other estates might be, they were still inadmissible 'be rason that ane gilty man suld accuse no man of cryme'.<sup>3</sup> The commons, then, despite their eloquent plea to the contrary, remained guilty of the charges against them and, if Wedderburn was not prepared to exonerate them from treason, he was even less prepared to support their political aspirations. For he went on to argue that, if they were granted the privileges asked for by Laubir, they would inevitably only abuse them because 'the maist part of them ar evil condicionet & ar

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1. Ibid., 103-6.

2. Ibid., 106-8.

3. Ibid., 108-9.



obedient to there apetitis and to there glaykyt affections'. Indeed, as far as Wedderburn was concerned, the common people were fundamentally vicious, enemies to virtue who 'suld be daly dantit & haldin in subiectiōne be cause that zour hartis is ful of maleis, ignorance, variance & inconstance'. Furthermore, continued Wedderburn, because of their inherent irresponsibility and indiscipline, when common men did achieve riches or high office they invariably proved 'mair ambicius ande ignorant nor any gentil man, sperutual or temporal that ar discendit of the maist nobil barons of the cuntre'.<sup>1</sup> Here, interestingly enough, Wedderburn appears to be arguing that virtue is the preserve of those of noble or gentle birth, a contention which returns us to the problem of 'true nobility' encountered in a previous chapter and which seems to align Wedderburn with ultra-conservative chivalric views.<sup>2</sup> Yet when Dame Scotia moves on to criticize the nobility themselves - dismissing Laubir with the admonition to 'fyrst correct thy self or thou accuse they nychtbour'.<sup>3</sup> - a rather different perception of the relationship between virtue and noble birth becomes apparent.

In fact, the whole of Dame Scotia's exhortation to 'hir eldest sonne callit the nobilis and gentil men' is concerned with analysing the nature of vera nobilitas. Moreover, Dame Scotia immediately intimates that it is founded essentially on virtue by arguing that, although 'zou professis to be nobilis ande gentil men, there is nocht ane sperk of nobilnes nor gentrice amang the maist part of zou'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., 109-12.

2. See above, pp.43ff.

3. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 113.

4. Ibid., 113.

Indeed, so emphatic was Wedderburn that true nobility was not derived from birth that he had Dame Scotia rehearse similar egalitarian arguments to those whose validity she had denied when spoken by Laubir! She tells the nobility, for example, that 'al man kynd are creat of mud and clay' and that, when dead, 'we sal carye no thing furtht of this warld bot the coulpe of our synnis, or the meritis of our vertu'.<sup>1</sup> Much more interestingly, however, Dame Scotia also employs wholly non-biblical, naturalistic arguments in order to explain the origins of titles of nobility. That is, she posits a golden age 'in the gude anciant dais' when no 'degree' existed, when 'al men war egal' and when communities lived a frugal life of peaceful coexistence. Admittedly, after a long time, 'nature provokit them to begyn sum litil police', but even then these simple peoples remained free of the corrupting influences which Wedderburn condemned in terms familiar to us from Boece and Bellenden:

... at that tyme the pepil drank nothir wyne nor beir, nor na uthir confekkit drinkis. At that tyme straynge cuntreis war nocht socht to get spicis, eirbis, droggis, gummis & succur for to mak exquisit electuars to provoke the pepil til ane disordinat appetit. At that tyme there was no sumptuous clethyng of fine clayt and of gold & silk of diverse fassons, at that tyme in the begynnyng of ther police, coppir, bras, and yrn and uthir mettellis war meltit to mak utensel, veschel necessair to serve ane houshald and war nocht meltit to be gunnis and cannons to sla doune the pepil.<sup>2</sup>

As this suggests, however, the golden age had gradually given way to one of iron: meekness had been transformed into malice, labour into

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1. Ibid., 120, 122.

2. Ibid., 114-5.



idleness, love into hatred and peace into war. The cause of this transformation - a transformation which explains the origin of political society no less than that of titles of nobility - was that evil men began to oppress their neighbours and, in order to protect themselves, communities chose 'gouvernours of the maist robust & maist prudent to be there deffendours' and these governors rewarded 'the pepil that hed usit them maist vailzeantly contrar there enemeis' with spoils and booty, while the 'lasche cowardis gat nathing'. In this way, Wedderburn concluded, 'began the fyrst nobilnes and gentreis in the world, for thai that war vailzeant, thai war reput for nobilis and gentil men, and thai that war vicius & cowardis war reput for vilanis and carlis'.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from suggesting the possible influence of Cicero, this is not the place to discuss the sources of Wedderburn's unusually naturalistic interpretation of the foundations of political society and noble status.<sup>2</sup> Rather we must concentrate on its implications in terms of Dame Scotia's exhortation to her eldest son. The weight of the argument thus far leads her to the general conclusion that 'na man can mereit or can be capabil of nobilnes or gentreis bot gyf tha be verteous' and that nobility is 'ane accidental qualite, in sa far as it may cum til ane persoun be his vertu, and he maye be degradit fra it

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1. Ibid., 115.

2. Unusually for Wedderburn, he is completely reticent about his sources for this view of pre-political society and it is so briefly stated as to make any ascription tentative at best. Although the opening paragraphs of Cicero's De Inventione are a possibility, it is not altogether clear whether Wedderburn would agree with Cicero that men were initially solitary wanderers. The Complaynt seems in fact to presuppose a natural sociability which is perhaps more reminiscent of Aristotle.

for his vice'.<sup>1</sup> On this basis, Dame Scotia argues that the members of the first estate owe their titles of nobility to their predecessors who performed 'nobil actis' for 'the comont weil of the realme' and that they are obliged to follow 'the futsteppis of zour predecessors in vertu' or else be degraded from their nobility. It is, however, the latter alternative which Dame Scotia thinks more appropriate, for the 'imbecilite, avereis and contentione' of the Scottish nobles seem to indicate only their 'pretendit gentreis' and complete lack of virtue.<sup>2</sup> When their noble ancestors died, Dame Scotia ruefully concludes, 'thai tuke ther vertu and gentreis witht them to ther sepulture and thai left na thing witht zou bot the stile of there gentreis'. The present nobility are vicious and corrupt, enemies of honesty, prudence and chastity, and so far has the idea of nobility been perverted that 'ane man is nocht reput for ane gentil man' unless 'he mak mair expensis of his horse and his doggis nor he dois on his wyfe & bayrnis'.<sup>3</sup> Dame Scotia, therefore, exhorts her eldest son to correct his vicious way of life and to adhere to 'al verteous byssynes' so that she might be relieved of her affliction.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, however, the virtues she has in mind relate to war rather than peace. In the face of English belligerence, Wedderburn - despite his humanistic interest in the classics - made no attempt to redefine virtue in terms of polite learning and his emphasis remained wholeheartedly martial. Given the grave threat to the integrity of the realm, he

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1. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 116.

2. Ibid., 116-8.

3. Ibid., 122-3.

4. Ibid., 123-4.



chose to dwell on the honours and triumphs of war, equating virtue and nobility exclusively with 'vailzeant actis' committed for the 'public weil'.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, so over-riding was Wedderburn's commitment to the defence of the realm that even his critique of the spiritual estate was concerned more with martial valour than scholastic learning. Assuredly, Dame Scotia chides the clergy for setting a poor moral example and for not mediating in disputes between the other two estates, but the main thrust of her exhortation to them is that they 'put al cerimonial scrupulnes furtht of zour hartis & that ze pas in propir person contrar zour ald enemeis'.<sup>2</sup> The clergy, no less than the nobility and commons, were obliged to defend the realm, and the Complaynt ends with an appeal to all three estates to cease their selfish bickering and to unite in opposition to their ancient foe.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, not so to do was, according to Wedderburn, an unnatural and suicidal betrayal of their native land: 'O ze my thre sonis', laments Dame Scotia, 'quhat can the warld estime of zou, quhen ze ar sa solist on the ruuyne of zour prosperite and on the demolitione of zour comont weil?'<sup>4</sup> As the Complaynt as a whole makes abundantly clear, Wedderburn believed that Dame Scotia's affliction would be relieved and the commonweal restored to health only if the Scots abandoned their vicious ways and returned to the virtuous manners of their ancient forbears.

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1. Ibid., 117.

2. Ibid., 124-30. The exhortation to the spiritual estate is in fact only half as long as those to the nobility and commons.

3. Ibid., 130ff.

4. Ibid., 131.

## IV

In important respects, then, Wedderburn's Complaynt provides evidence of and access to the broader ideological context in which the appeals of contemporary Scottish politicians to the commonweal and liberty of the realm must be placed. Moreover, as should by now be clear, it was a context whose development we have already traced through the late middle ages to its eventual fruition in works such as Boece's Scotorum Historiae. Not surprisingly, therefore, parts of the Complaynt - like a great deal of the politicians' rhetoric - are reminiscent not only of Boece and Bellenden, but even of Fordun and Barbour. All employed a language which, although it had certainly not remained entirely unchanged, had nevertheless shown remarkable resilience and stability over a period of almost two centuries. Implicit in the politicians' invocation of the commonweal, for example, is a pattern of thought which Fordun and Barbour would have recognized immediately : namely, a firm conviction in Scotland's freedom from overlordship and an appeal to the example of those generations of virtuous Scots who for centuries successfully defended the realm from foreign - specifically English - pretensions. To employ the language of the commonweal was, in other words, not only to speak with a markedly patriotic accent, but also to assume a patriotic ideology which there was little need to spell out in detail.<sup>1</sup> In effect, the

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1. This is not to say, however, as evidenced in section II of this chapter, either that all those who employed commonweal language believed in what they said and implied in using it or, indeed, that they were believed by others to believe in what they said and implied. Yet the very fact that such people felt it necessary or profitable to construe their actions in these terms is itself important testimony to the power and influence of commonweal discourse in mid-sixteenth century Scotland.



Scottish answer to unionist propaganda was implicit in the normative language of the political community at large. It is perhaps hardly surprising, then, that Wedderburn wasted so little time in actually justifying Scottish resistance to the Rough Wooing. The legitimacy of the Scottish cause was an assumption built into the language in which the Complaynt was couched.

In one crucial respect, however, Wedderburn's use of commonweal discourse was in fact quite uncharacteristic of a sixteenth century Scot. For nowhere in the Complaynt did he comment at any length on the otherwise apparently paradigmatic connection between kingship and the commonweal. Assuredly, like the majority of his contemporaries and predecessors, he did see a virtuous prince as important to the survival and stability of the realm. Yet, faced with an inevitably protracted minority, Wedderburn was much more concerned with those 'inconstant superiors of ane cuntre that ar nocht in ane accord to gouerne the public weil, nor zit hes ane constant substancial counsel to gouerne ane realme quhen the prince or princes ar in tendir aige'.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, we find in the Complaynt no wistful pining for an adult monarch capable of leading the fight for Scotland's freedom. On the contrary, in the face of Somerset's invasion and occupation of the realm, Wedderburn simply urged the estates to end their senseless bickering and to unite in defence of their commonweal. Contemporaries of Wedderburn, however, men more concerned with Scotland's internal governance than the external threat to its existence, did not hesitate to focus attention squarely on the figure of the prince. One such was

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1. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 23-4.

Sir David Lindsay, whose later works - the Monarche written between 1548 and 1553 and Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis performed at Cupar in 1552 - are both in their different ways deeply concerned with the critical relationship between kingship and the commonweal. Moreover, as we shall see, it was a relationship which, although still conceived largely in conventional terms, was nevertheless being subtly reappraised in the light of a rising tide of religious criticism and dissent.



## Chapter Seven

From Virtue to Godliness : The  
Later Works of Sir David Lindsay

The impact of the Rough Wooing on religious opinion in Scotland is not easily assessed. Successive English invasions and the presence of radical preachers such as the Anglo-Scot George Wishart certainly exposed the Scots as never before to Protestant doctrine. Furthermore, the authorization in 1543 of the use of vernacular Bibles and the subsequent supply and distribution of the same by the English government did nothing to discourage the movement for reform. Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to assume that the events of the 1540's made a marked contribution to a steadily rising and ultimately irresistible tide of popular Protestant zealotry. On the contrary, although Lutheran literature was circulating in Scotland from as early as the 1520's, recent research has revealed that the reformed faith was remarkably slow to take firm root in the northern kingdom and that the years of the Rough Wooing were of little significance to its growth. The work of Ian Cowan, for example, confirmed in many respects by that of Michael Lynch, has highlighted the apparent lack of any continuously mounting support for Protestantism in the three decades preceding 1560 and indicated both the limited and highly localized nature of such support as there actually was.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it was only in those few

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1. See Ian B. Cowan, The Scottish Reformation : Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland (London, 1982), esp. Ch.5, an expanded version of the same author's Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation (Historical Association Pamphlet, London, 1978). Cf. Michael Lynch, Edinburgh and the Reformation (Edinburgh, 1981), which charts the somewhat haphazard development of Protestantism in Scotland's capital.

areas where local lairds and magnates were prepared actively to protect and encourage reforming preachers that Protestant sympathies were either deep-rooted or long-lived. As regards the 1540's, this is perhaps best illustrated by the ministry of George Wishart who returned to Scotland, probably at the behest of the English government, in the company of Henry VIII's commissioners sent to negotiate the Treaty of Greenwich in 1543.<sup>1</sup> Wishart's ministry was confined largely to Ayrshire and the Mearns, both of them areas dominated by Protestant landowners in the form respectively of Alexander Cunningham, 5th earl of Glencairn, and Sir John Erskine of Dun. Indeed, when he ventured into the Lothians, all but a handful of the local lairds who initially befriended him there deserted him as soon as he was arrested on charges of heresy.<sup>2</sup> Given the weakness of Scottish Protestantism, it is perhaps hardly surprising that little was done to prevent Cardinal Beaton burning Wishart at the stake in 1546. Admittedly, the cardinal was himself assassinated later in the same year by a group of avowedly Protestant Fife lairds, but this grim episode probably had as much to do with Henry VIII's political machinations as it did with the assassins' own religious affiliations. Moreover, subsequently besieged in Beaton's castle at St. Andrews, the so-called Castilians were unable to turn their attempted coup to the advantage of either England or Protestantism. At the end of July 1547, still vainly awaiting relief from England, they were obliged to surrender both themselves and the castle to a French fleet. Even the presence of John Knox - making

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1. For details of Wishart's activities, see The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing (Wodrow Society, 1846-64), i, 125-71.

2. Cowan, Scottish Reformation, 101-7 (Regional Aspects, 14-7).



his political as well as his preaching debut in their ranks - was unable to prevent their capitulation to the established authorities.<sup>1</sup>

According to Knox, following the surrender of the Castilians, there was in Scotland 'nothing but myrth; for all yead [= went] with the preastis eavin at thare awin pleasur'.<sup>2</sup> The Scottish Catholic hierarchy, however, had no reason to feel complacent. The fact, for example, that there was little outright support for Protestantism in the 1540's cannot be construed as a vote of confidence in the existing ecclesiastical system. On the contrary, as the reforming council instituted by Archbishop Hamilton in 1549 suggests, many Scots were profoundly dissatisfied with the state of the contemporary church and anxious to see its manifold defects quickly remedied.<sup>3</sup> Although doubtless ailing, however, one must beware of exaggerating the extent to which the pre-Reformation kirk had succumbed to the terminal diseases diagnosed in such loving detail by its many contemporary critics. To some degree at least, the desire for reform was inspired not so much by a sudden decline in the church's health as by the heightened expectations of an increasingly literate, vocal and critical laity.<sup>4</sup> The growth in lay literacy in the century after 1450 - a development

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1. On the Castilian episode, see Knox, Works, i, 171-208.

2. Ibid., i, 208.

3. On the state of the pre-Reformation kirk, see Cowan, Scottish Reformation, Chs.1-4, and Gordon Donaldson, The Scottish Reformation (Cambridge, 1960), Chs.1-2.

4. For this argument, see Jenny Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community : Scotland 1470-1625 (London, 1981), esp. Chs.5-6. What follows owes a good deal to Dr. Wormald's suggestive interpretation of the state of religious opinion in mid-sixteenth century Scotland.

remarked upon in an earlier chapter<sup>1</sup> - if it had not by the mid-sixteenth century produced a class of gentlemen-governors modelled on humanist lines, had certainly contributed to the emergence of articulate and independently-minded lairds who were quite prepared to criticize the inadequacies of an ill-educated clergy and to formulate their own opinions as to the best means of achieving spiritual salvation. It was men such as these who provided the inspiration for and backbone of the movement for reform. Yet clearly they did not rush headlong into the arms of the Protestant zealots. Nor, indeed, was there any reason why they should have done so. After all, not only did reform from within the Catholic fold still appear perfectly feasible, but Protestantism had become closely identified with a policy of union with England. Now, to those many Scots whose political horizons were delimited by the dominant ideology of patriotic conservatism, such an association rendered Protestantism a much less appealing option than it might otherwise have seemed. In a sense, in fact, this situation played straight into the hands of the Catholic authorities who, with stronger and more dynamic leadership, might well have contrived to set their house in order and thus to satisfy many of the laity's demands and aspirations without the wholesale destruction of their church.<sup>2</sup> As it was, however, such leadership never

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1. See above, pp.56-7.

2. In fact, following the council of 1549, a further two were held in 1552 and 1559 in which concessions were made to the laity's demands for vernacular services and attempts were made to reform the morals of the clerical estate. It is, of course, questionable whether reform from within could ever have been anything other than cosmetic and whether the laity's aspirations could ever have been satisfied within the existing structure of the church. The Catholic authorities in Scotland were, however, clearly confident of success (see Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community, 92-4).



materialized and in its absence Protestantism was to triumph in Scotland almost by default.

How this came about will be discussed further in a later chapter. Meanwhile, it is important to examine in more detail the ideological tensions which arose in the Scottish mind when religious radicalism was coupled with political conservatism. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the later works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount. Although his literary accomplishments set him apart from his less poetically-inclined contemporaries, Lindsay is not in fact unrepresentative of the new breed of literate and often highly educated lairds who played such a significant role in the history of the Reformation in Scotland. Born around 1490, possibly as early as 1486, where Lindsay acquired his education is not known.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it certain how he first became associated with the royal court, but apart from a brief spell during the 1520's Lindsay served James V throughout his minority and in the 1530's became one of the king's heralds. The latter office involved him in extensive diplomatic activities and Lindsay made several visits to foreign courts, including those of England, France and the Low Countries. Such travels probably contributed to his awareness of the extent to which the Catholic church was failing to fulfil its social and spiritual obligations and certainly exposed him to the religious ferment which was sweeping continental Europe. Before we examine Lindsay's religious views, however, it is as well to discuss an aspect of his thinking which is too often overlooked : that is, the

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1. For further biographical details, see the editor's introduction to The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, ed. Douglas Hamer (S.T.S., 1931-6), iv, ix-lvii. See also W. Murison, Sir David Lyndsay : Poet, and Satirist of the Old Church in Scotland (Cambridge, 1938), 1-19.

highly conventional understanding of the political world in which his radical critique of the church is set.

## I

As we have already seen, most of Lindsay's early poetry is concerned with the nature and function of kingship. In poems such as The Dreame (1528), The Complaynt of Schir David Lindesay (1529/30) and, in particular, The Testament of the Papyngo (1530), he dwelt at length on the virtues befitting a king and on the importance of a virtuous monarch to the realm over which he ruled.<sup>1</sup> These strictures were directed at the then youthful James V and Lindsay's conception of kingship was moulded by the commonplace view of an ideal prince which, enshrined in the speculum principis genre of political literature, dominated the political thought of the majority of his Scottish contemporaries. The passing of the years, his extensive diplomatic travels in the 1530's and his elevation to the post of Lord Lyon King of Arms (the highest Scottish heraldic office) did little to change these ideas. His Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis, for example, despite its title and despite being better known for its abusive anti-clericalism, remains as extensive a disquisition on the traditional view of kingship as anything we have yet encountered. As will become clear, Protestant modes of thought certainly made their impact on Lindsay, but they did little to alter - perhaps, indeed, served only to reinforce - his view of kingship as the key to the well-being and prosperity of any political

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1. See above, pp.61ff.



community. If 'godliness' rather than the more conventional secular virtues is the kingly attribute focused upon in his later work, this marks a change of emphasis within a well established framework of ideas and preconceptions, not a change in the framework itself. Lindsay's view of kingship as revealed in the Satyre differs hardly at all from that expressed in his earlier poetry and thus hardly at all from that to be found almost universally throughout the later middle ages and beyond.

Indeed, the similarity between the Satyre and Lindsay's earlier poetry - including several direct borrowings from the latter - has led one critic to date the play as early as the late 1520's or 1530's and to identify the figure of Rex Humanitas around whom it revolves directly with James V.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is lent further credence by the existence of a description (but not the actual text) of an 'interlude' performed before the king at Linlithgow on Twelfth Night 1540. Although no indication of authorship is given, this description does sound like an early and less complete version of the Satyre as we know it from the surviving text of a performance given at Cupar in June 1552.<sup>2</sup> The latter version, however, is sufficiently extended and sufficiently different in points of detail to justify the assumption that, if Lindsay was the author of the 1540 play, he completely rewrote it later in the decade. In other words, the text of the Satyre as we have it dates

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1. John MacQueen, 'Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis', Studies in Scottish Literature, III (1966), 129-43.

2. The description of the 'interlude' is printed in Lindsay, Works, ii, 1-6. Thereafter, two versions of the Satyre are printed on facing pages, one based on the Bannatyne MS and the other on the published edition of 1602. All subsequent references are to the latter.

from the late 1540's and early 1550's and the figure of Rex Humanitas is not a specific representation of James V but a universal type of kingship to which the Scottish king, like any other, might easily conform.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in the first half of the Satyre, Lindsay merely dramatized the basic arguments of the speculum genre, while in the second half he portrayed the effects of a corrupt monarch on the realm as a whole and indicated how such evils might be remedied.<sup>2</sup> Before analysing this latter diagnosis and prescription, however, a brief outline of the plot of the first part of the Satyre will clearly demonstrate the extent to which Lindsay's conception of kingship conformed to a well established and highly conventional pattern.

The play begins, for example, with the temptation of Rex Humanitas by Wantonnes, Solace and Placebo and his succumbing at their instigation to the charms of Dame Sensualitie. As a result of this corruption, the king allows Flattrie, Falset and Dissait - disguised as Devotion, Sapience and Discretion - to become respectively his secretary, treasurer and confessor. The vices thus established as his principal counsellors, Gude Counsall is banished from the realm and Veritie and Chastitie are ignominiously consigned to the stocks. At this point, however, Divyne Correctionoun intervenes and announces his intention of

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1. This is convincingly argued in several responses to MacQueen's original article. See, for example, Anna Jean Mill, 'The Original Version of Lindsay's Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis', Studies in Scottish Literature, VI (1968), 66-75; Vernon Hayward, 'Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis Again', *ibid.*, VII (1970), 139-46; and Joanne Spencer Kantrowitz, Dramatic Allegory: Lindsay's 'Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis' (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1975), Ch.1.

2. The interpretation of the Satyre offered here owes a great deal to Kantrowitz, Dramatic Allegory, 61ff.



calling a parliament of the three estates of the realm to initiate reform. Flattrie, Falset and Dissait immediately flee, Dame Sensualitie takes refuge with Spiritualitie, and Rex Humanitas, persuaded of the error of his ways, receives Gude Counsall, Veritie and Chastitie back into his company. Thereupon Diligence proclaims the meeting of the three estates which, in the second half of the performance, will reveal the illls wrought by a corrupt and vicious king and prescribe the necessary remedies.

Reduced to this barest of outlines, the conventionality of the Satyre is plainly obvious. Lindsay has simply dramatized the struggle between the virtues and the vices for control of the king's person and, in much the same way as did Bellenden in his 'Proheme to the Cosmographie',<sup>1</sup> presented the prince as having a choice between wanton indulgence of his passions and virtuous labour for the good of the realm. However, whereas Bellenden concluded his poem before the prince had made up his mind between the 'two plesand ladyis', Delight and Virtue, Lindsay went on to discuss the full implications of Dame Sensualitie's corrupting influence over a lustful prince. That is, he dramatized how Sensualitie's dominion led to the neglect of good counsel and to the supremacy of those political vices - flattery, falsehood and deceit - so often remarked upon in the speculum genre and so prominent in the Scottish political literature we have examined thus far. Indeed, the reigns of the forty mythical kings so painstakingly detailed in the early books of Boece's Scotorum Historiae are no more than a series of variations on and adaptations of the archetypal

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1. See above, p.62.

scenario just described. Nor is this surprising, for both Lindsay and Boece wrote according to the well-worn conventions of an established mode of political thought and both made the near paradigmatic assumption that the manners of the prince - his propensity for virtue or for vice - determined the well-being or commonweal of the realm as a whole. Consequently, just as Boece emphasized the moral and political dynamic inherent in a prince's personal conduct, so in the Satyre Veritie warns:

Let not the fault be left into the head  
 Then sall the members reulit be at richt.  
 For quhy subiects do follow day and nicht  
 Their governours in vertew and in vyce.  
Ze ar the lamps that sould schaw the licht  
To leid them on this sliddrie rone of yce.  
Mobile mutatur semper cum principe vulgus.  
 And gif ze wald zour subiectis war weill gevin,  
 Then verteouslie begin the dance zour sell;  
 Going befoir, then they anone I wein,  
 Sall follow zow, eyther till hevin or hell:  
 Kings sould of gude exempils be the well.  
 Bot gif that zour strands be intoxicate,  
 In steid of wyne thay drink the poyson fell:  
 Thus pepill follows ay thair principate.<sup>1</sup>

Significantly enough, the Latin quotation from the classical poet Claudian - 'the fickle mob changes always with the prince' - was used not only by Lindsay, but also by John of Fordun in the fourteenth century and, as we shall see, by George Buchanan later in the sixteenth. It was, in fact, a staple text of the specula principum, providing writers in the genre with a rationale of distinguished origins for their exhortations to wayward or simply youthful monarchs. Clearly, Lindsay's political thought, like that of the majority of his Scottish

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1. Satyre, ll. 1045-59.



contemporaries, was still dominated by the commonplace ideal of a virtuous prince whose exemplary manners would be emulated by his subjects. It was, indeed, a paradigm of kingship which sixteenth century Scots proved extremely reluctant to abandon.

The conventionality of Lindsay's understanding of kingship, however, extends beyond his portrayal of Rex Humanitas himself to the structure of the Satyre as a whole. The importance of good counsel and the evils of flattery, for example, are built into the dramatic action of the play and hardly require further comment. But so far the theme of justice has not been touched upon. Nevertheless, it is a primary concern of the Satyre and, indeed, the aspect of kingship which lends its two parts real thematic unity. Again, such an emphasis should not occasion surprise : after all, the king's function was not simply to exemplify virtue, it was also to promote it through the equitable administration of justice. This remained as true in Lindsay's day as it had been throughout the middle ages. In 1556, for example, a certain William Lauder published Ane Compendius and Breve Tractate concernyng ye Office and Dewtie of Kyngis in which he contended that the main function of a prince was 'To minister and cause ministrat be, / Iustice, to all, with equitie', or, put another way, 'To ponsche Vice, and treit virtew, / This is ane Princis office dew'.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this same function was commented upon by Lindsay when he had Gude Counsall tell Rex Humanitas that:

The principall point Sir of ane kings office  
Is for to do evirilk man iustice,  
And for to mix his iustice with mercie,  
But rigour favour or parcialitie.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Lauder, Breve Tractate, ed. Fitzedward Hall (E.E.T.S., 1864), ll. 11-2, 27-8.

2. Satyre, ll. 1882-5.

Indeed, just as Lauder prefaced his brief tract with the Latin tag 'Deligite Iustitiam qui iudicatis terram', so the precise same words are spoken by Veritie in the Satyre.<sup>1</sup> The theme of justice, however, is not only significant in terms of such isolated references, it provides also the essential link between the two halves of the Satyre. For, if the first part of the play portrays the corruption of a prince, the second deals with the restoration of justice to a realm which has suffered from its absence during the reign of an evil monarch. Hence the importance of Divyne Correction - 'ane Iudge richt potent and seveir, / Cum to do Iustice monie thowsand myle' - whose first line in the Satyre is not inappropriately a quotation from St. Matthew: 'Beati qui esuriant & sitiunt Iustitiam'.<sup>2</sup> Divyne Correction is the embodiment of justice, sent not only to show the king the error of his ways, but also to summon 'Ane Parleament of the estaitis all' where, aided by Gude Counsall, Rex Humanitas can restore justice to his realm. It is this parliament and its enactments which form the setting and substance of the second part of the Satyre. Significantly enough, moreover, a principal protagonist in this part of the action is none other than 'Iohne the common-weill of fair Scotland'.

In Wedderburn's Complaynt, as we saw, Scotland's sorry condition is graphically illustrated by Dame Scotia's bedraggled and desolate appearance. In Lindsay's Satyre a similar impression is conveyed by the dramatic entrance of John the Commonweal. For Lindsay as for

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1. Ibid., l. 1026; the words occur on the title page of Lauder's Tractate.
  2. In fact, the whole of Correction's opening speech (from which these quotes are taken) is concerned with justice, see Satyre, ll. 1572-1620.



Wedderburn, the concept of the commonweal had a key (indeed, in the Satyre, quite literal) role to perform. For it is John the Commonweal who spearheads the attack on the corrupt estates and pleads with Rex Humanitas to institute reform. Naked and presumably bemired from the ditch into which he falls on making his entrance, John is immediately recognized by Rex Humanitas as having been 'amang his fais'. 'Quhat is the caus the common weil is crukit?' inquires the king. 'Becaus the common-weill hes bene overlukit', replies John.<sup>1</sup> During the reign of a vicious king, justice has not been impartially administered and the commonweal has been neglected. John, therefore, implores the newly reformed king to call the corrupt estates before him and 'put them in ordour, / Or els John the common-weil man beg on the bordour'.<sup>2</sup> In other words, just as in his Dreme of 1528 the corruption of the estates had led to John's banishment furth of the realm, so in the Satyre Lindsay employed a similar device to underline Scotland's plight and to reinforce his plea for reform. It is worth pointing out, however, that John the Commonweal cannot be identified exclusively with the common people. On the contrary, as his full name makes clear enough, he represents the welfare or common good of the realm as a whole. Certainly, for Lindsay as for Wedderburn, it was the commons who suffered most when king, nobility and clergy were corrupt and vicious, but, for both men, the commonweal nevertheless implied and encompassed more than the sectional interests of one particular estate. When, for example, at the climax of the Satyre, Lindsay had John bedecked in new finery and given a place in parliament, he was

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1. Ibid., ll. 2436-40.

2. Ibid., ll. 2444-59.

dramatizing, not the common people's right to a voice in such assemblies, but rather the new spirit which animates a realm led by a just and virtuous prince. As Divyne Correctioun comments: 'All verteous peopil now may be reioisit, / Sen Common-weill hes gottin ane gay garmoun'. No longer 'cauld, naikit and disgysit', John the Commonweal has assumed his proper place at the heart of the kingdom's most august deliberative assembly. Moreover, with 'common weill' rather than 'singular profiteit' as their touch-stone and guide, the king and the estates can carry out the reforms essential to Scotland's health and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Quite clearly, the idea of the commonweal played as significant a role in Lindsay's political thought as it did in that of Wedderburn. For both men it provided the test of virtuous political activity as well as the objective towards which such activity should be directed. But, whereas Wedderburn exhorted the estates to look to the commonweal of the realm, Lindsay was more interested in the prince's role in its promotion. This difference, however, is largely a function of the disparate aims of the two authors, not of incompatible preconceptions regarding the commonweal itself. For whereas Wedderburn was writing in response to the particular circumstance of foreign invasion, Lindsay was writing a morality play on the universal theme of kingship. Wedderburn, in other words, was concerned with re-establishing the freedom of the realm at a particular juncture in its history (a juncture at which there was no king to whom to appeal), while Lindsay was preoccupied with the universals of royal governance which held good

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1. Ibid., ll. 3763-92.



irrespective of temporal referents. Nevertheless, for all their differences in style, approach and purpose, both men could employ that same language of the commonweal in which their Scottish contemporaries habitually described and discussed their political environment. In effect, all they had done was to develop and treat separately the two elements of Scottish political thought - those relating to the freedom of the realm and to its internal governance - which the idea of the commonweal had brought into such close conjunction. Far from being incompatible, therefore, Lindsay's Satyre and Wedderburn's Complaynt are complementary. Taken together, one might argue, they reveal the nature and implications of commonweal discourse in as great a detail as does Bellenden's translation of Boece's History.

## II

Yet, although Lindsay made the same paradigmatic connection between kingship and the commonweal as did the likes of Boece and Bellenden, there is one critical difference in emphasis which cannot be lightly overlooked. That is, his belief that the prince should not simply be virtuous, but that he should, above all else, be 'godly'. There was, of course, nothing unusual in instructing a prince to lead a religious life - such strictures could be quoted from Fordun, Mair, Boece and many others - but with Lindsay this particular royal attribute assumes renewed importance and is pursued with much greater intensity. It is implicit, for example, in the fifteen acts passed by the estates after John the Commonweal has been formally admitted to their deliberations. For in contrast to Wedderburn, who devoted most of the Complaynt to castigating the temporal estates, the main burden

of this legislation falls squarely on the clergy. It is, of course, well-known that Lindsay turned his satirical pen most frequently and tellingly against the clergy and the details of his repeated and oft-quoted indictments of their morals and mores need not detain us here.<sup>1</sup> What is important in the present context is that this preoccupation - even obsession - with ecclesiastical reformation had profound repercussions on his view of kingship. For, if it is still debatable whether or not Lindsay was theologically a Protestant (of whatever precise hue), he was undeniably influenced by Lutheran ideas of ecclesiastical reform imposed, not by the pope or the spiritual hierarchy, but by a secular 'godly magistracy'.<sup>2</sup> In common with many early reformers, Catholic as well as Protestant, Lindsay believed the Roman hierarchy to be spiritually moribund and morally bankrupt. As a result, he looked to a godly prince to fill the vacuum left by the papacy and to initiate the reforms necessary to cleanse and purify the church. Hence, in the Satyre, when the king and the estates legalize clerical marriage, insist on an educated and preaching priesthood, forbid absenteeism and pluralism, and so on, they are enacting a reformation which, if not necessarily Protestant, certainly pays scant attention to the jurisdictional rights customarily exercised by the

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1. For a detailed analysis of his criticisms of the church, see Murison, Sir David Lindsay, Ch.3; cf. Cowan, Scottish Reformation, 72-6.

2. For a discussion of Lindsay's theological views, see Brother Kenneth, 'Sir David Lindsay, Reformer', Innes Review, I (1950), 79-91. The conclusion reached in this article that Lindsay 'would seem to shade off from a reforming Catholic to a Catholic-minded Reformer' (p.91) seems to me to be broadly accurate. Certainly, although he occasionally sailed extremely close to the wind, it would be ill-advised to consider Lindsay as anything other than sympathetic towards Protestantism.



pope.<sup>1</sup> Lindsay was clearly concerned, at least in the first instance, with the 'commonweal of fair Scotland' and, to restore it to health and vigour, he believed the rotting structure of the kirk had to be thoroughly reformed. In order to achieve this end, however, he appealed not to an apparently impotent pope or even to the corrupt Scottish hierarchy, but to a godly Scottish prince.

The Satyre, then, while remaining securely embedded in a conventional mould, does break some new ground in its call for godly kingship. At the same time, moreover, it descends from the universals of princely governance with which it is primarily concerned to a particular indictment of the Scottish clergy of the mid-sixteenth century. Paradoxically, this process of particularization is taken still further in the most speculative of Lindsay's works, his Dialog betuix Experience and ane Courteour, better and more conveniently known as the Monarche. Although undoubtedly now the least read of Lindsay's works, the Monarche has nevertheless some claim to being the most important and influential of his poems.<sup>2</sup> Written near the close of his life, probably between 1548 and 1553, it is a forbiddingly long (over six thousand lines) and brooding review of the four world 'monarchies' or empires - Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman - which culminates in a grimly detailed description of the fifth papal monarchy currently dominating the latter days of the world. This historical periodization

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1. For the acts passed by the three estates, see Satyre, ll. 3793-3943.

2. Certainly, in the sixteenth century, it was reprinted much more frequently than the Satyre which was not included in editions of Lindsay's works. For this and further information regarding the composition of the Monarche, see Lindsay, Works, iii, 242f, and iv, 5ff.

is based on the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation and, in its broad outline, Lindsay's interpretation fits within the general framework of maturing Protestant apocalypticism.<sup>1</sup> For, although Lindsay (unlike many contemporary Protestants) was reluctant to identify the pope himself as the prophesied Antichrist - warning his readers that anyone who contravened Christ's law 'is ane verray Antichriste' - he did not hesitate to characterize the papal kingdom as Babylonish in its iniquity and, if not immediately and radically reformed, sure to suffer the plagues foretold in the Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> The papacy, however, as Lindsay had intimated in the Satyre, looked increasingly incapable of reforming itself and the mire of ungodly and idolatrous corruption in which Christendom in general and Scotland in particular were floundering was construed in the Monarche as presaging the Last Judgment. Lindsay refrained from dating the impending cataclysm with any precision, but he did refer to the Talmudic prophecy of Elias which divided the duration of the world into three ages of two thousand years, the third of which - from the incarnation to the second coming of Christ - would be cut short by an unspecified length of time.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen hundred years of the last age having already passed, the world

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1. For Lindsay's place in and contribution to the development of apocalyptic interpretations of world history, see Katharine R. Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain (Oxford, 1979), 113f.
  2. See Monarche (in Lindsay, Works, i, 197-386), ll. 5172-253, 4935-59.
  3. Lindsay's authority for this was the German Chronica (1532) of John Carion, a work which he frequently cites and which, translated into Latin (1537) and English (1550), was extremely influential among British Protestants with an interest in apocalyptic speculation. On Lindsay's use of Carion, see Works, iii, 238-42.



was drawing perilously close to its end and Lindsay's sense of foreboding is in evidence throughout the Monarche.

With this in mind, it is perhaps worth pointing out that Lindsay was not the only contemporary Scotsman to indulge in such apocalyptic speculation. Robert Wedderburn also insisted that the world was 'neir ane final ende' and likewise invoked the prophecy of Elias in support of his contention. Indeed, according to the Complaynt, 'mony of the singis & taikkyns' signalling the Day of Judgment had already been seen, while 'the remanent ar now presently in oure dais'.<sup>1</sup> Lindsay was merely echoing these observations when he adduced as proof of his own speculations those:

Tokynnys of darth, hunger and pestilence,  
With cruell weris, baith be sey and land,  
Realme aganis realme with mortall violence,<sup>2</sup>  
Quhilk signifyis the last day ewin at hand.

At least in part, both Lindsay's and Wedderburn's forebodings arose as a result of the extreme hardships inflicted upon Scotland in the course of the Rough Wooing. As we have already seen, Wedderburn believed that the Scots were suffering the plagues administered by God to a sinful people and Lindsay, significantly enough, thought in precisely the same terms. Scotland, he contended, was incurring the scourge of God, and war, pestilence and famine - 'His Thrynfald wande of Flagellatioun' - were meant as reminders to the Scots of the need to repent of their

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1. See The Complaynt of Scotland, ed. A. M. Stewart (S.T.S., 1979), 28-9. Like Lindsay, moreover, Wedderburn also cited the authority of 'master ihone carion' (p.28).

2. Monarche, ll. 4238-41.

'grevous offence'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, just as Wedderburn argued (in terms which might have gratified even William Patten!) that God had 'permittit the inglis men to scourge' the Scots, so Lindsay agreed that God had licensed a 'strange pepill' to act as His 'scourge' and to punish them for their manifest iniquities.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Patten, however, neither Wedderburn nor Lindsay numbered reneging on the providential match between Queen Mary and Prince Edward among the Scots' manifold sins. Wedderburn, for example, interpreted England's role as an instrument of God's vengeance in quite different, if wholly characteristic terms:

... the cruel inglis men that hes scurgit us, hes nocht dune it of manhede or wisdome nor of ane gude zeil: bot rather the supreme plasmator of havyn ande eird hes permittit them to be boreaus [= executioners] to punish us for the myscknauage of his magestie. Quhair for I treist that his divine iustice wil permit sum uther strayne natione to be mercyles boreaus to them, and til extinct that fals seid and that incredule generatione furtht of remembrance, be caus thai ar, and also hes bene, the speciale motione of the iniust weyris that hes trublit cristianite thir sex hundreht zeir by past.<sup>3</sup>

Although somewhat less vituperative, Lindsay was equally unwilling to impute to the proposed marriage any apocalyptic significance and, as regards the English invasions, observed in similar vein that God would 'quhen he lyst, that scourge cast in the fyre'.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in contrast to Wedderburn, Lindsay did now and again give vent to what might

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1. Ibid., ll. 46-90. Wedderburn differs slightly from Lindsay in identifying the three plagues as war, pestilence and dissension among the three estates (see above, p.204).
  2. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 21; Lindsay, Monarche, ll. 88-90.
  3. Wedderburn, Complaynt, 21.
  4. Lindsay, Monarche, l. 90.



be interpreted as a resigned acceptance of the inevitability of union. On one occasion, for example, after commenting that 'the Scottis with all thare mycht, / Doith feycht for tyll defende thare rycht', he went on to remark that he feared that there would be no peace between 'thir Realmes of Albion' until 'they be, boith, onder ane kyng'.<sup>1</sup> As this suggests, however, if Lindsay did in fact favour dynastic union, it was on terms similar to those advocated by John Mair and not from the British imperialist standpoint of James Henrysone.<sup>2</sup> If anything, union possessed for Lindsay practical rather than apocalyptic import and his countrymen's refusal to honour the match between Queen Mary and Prince Edward was not the 'grevous offence' for which they were enduring God's punishment. On the contrary, in the same way as Wedderburn, Lindsay looked inside the realm for the source of the Scots' offence and located it - predictably enough - in the lax morals and corrupt manners of the people in general and the priesthood in particular.

There are, quite clearly, many similarities between the diagnosis of Scotland's ills put forward in Lindsay's Monarche and that in

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1. Ibid., ll. 5402-11.

2. Some further light is shed on Lindsay's attitude to union in his poem of 1547 entitled The Tragedie of the Late Cardinal Beaton (Works, i, 129-43), esp. ll. 176-203, where Beaton is blamed for all the 'harne & heirschip' which followed upon the breaking of the Treaty of Greenwich. It is then remarked that: 'Had we with Ingland kepit our contrackis, / Our nobyll men had leuit in peace and rest, / Our Merchandis had nocht lost so many packis, / Our commoun peple had nocht bene opprest; / On ather syde all wrangis had been redrest'. Beaton was, of course, precisely the kind of cleric against whom Lindsay was continually railing for neglecting his pastoral duties and the above comments must be read in the context of a more general indictment of all that Beaton stood for. Nevertheless, here at least Lindsay does seem to endorse a policy of dynastic union as a means, a la Mair, of promoting peace and stability between the two realms.

Wedderburn's Complaynt. Nevertheless, there remains an enormous difference in atmosphere between the two works. For example, whereas Wedderburn quickly abandoned his apocalyptic speculations and went on to issue a fighting challenge to his compatriots, Lindsay's poem is structured around his interpretation of prophecy and exudes a mood of gloomy fatalism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Monarche ends with Lindsay advocating a contemplative life of secluded withdrawal from 'this fals world' and with the advice to his readers that 'sen thow knawis the tyme is verrey schort, / In Cristis blude sett all thy hole confort'.<sup>1</sup> This theme of resigned withdrawal from the world is, in fact, a characteristic note of the Monarche. Yet it is not one that is consistently sounded. Lindsay was too much the satirist and too much the reformer to ignore what he saw as the vicious and lascivious lives of the entire Roman hierarchy. Nor did he hesitate to exploit his opportunities: the clergy emerge from the Monarche in no more edifying a light than they do from the Satyre and the plea for reform is no less stridently uttered.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there remains in the Monarche an unresolved tension between the poet's reforming instincts and his apocalyptic expectations which is quite absent from the Satyre and which nullifies the latter's optimistic affirmation of man's capacity to reform his own degenerate house. Nor, in the present context, is the cause of this tension entirely without interest.

In part, it indubitably stemmed from the much gloomier view expressed in the Monarche of the all but irremediable corruption

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1. Lindsay, Monarche, ll. 6267-75.

2. See for example *ibid.*, ll. 2397ff and 4465ff.



evident at the heart of the papal monarchy. Equally, however, it stemmed also from Lindsay's recognition that the ideal 'godly' prince of the Satyre had no counterpart in the Scotland of the 1540's and 1550's. As he lamented in the 'Epistil to the Redar' which prefaces the Monarche:

We have no Kyng, the [i.e., the poem] to present, allace,  
 Quhilk to this countre bene ane cairfull cace;  
 And als our Quene, of Scotland Heretour,  
 Sche dwellith in France; I pray God saif hir grace.  
 It war to lang, for the to ryn that race,  
 And far langar, or that young tender flour  
 Bryng home tyll us ane Kyng and Gouvernour.  
 Allace, tharefor, we may with sorrow syng,  
 Quhilk moste so lang remane without one king.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, whereas the Satyre dealt in ideal types and presented a solution in ideal terms, we are here dealing with the incontrovertible reality of a Scotland which could offer no immediate hope of a prince conforming to Lindsay's model of godly kingship. Perhaps in desperation, therefore, the poet addressed the Monarche to 'thame quhilk hes the realme in gouernance', to James Hamilton, earl of Arran, 'our prince and protectour', and to the latter's brother John, archbishop of St. Andrews, 'our spiritual Gouvernour'.<sup>2</sup> From this quarter, however, Lindsay expected little relief. Wedded to highly conventional political assumptions, he saw an exemplary prince as the essential source of justice and the essential source of godly reform. Later in the Monarche, for example, he wrote:

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1. Ibid., ll. 10-18; cf. ll. 3233-64, where Lindsay makes clear that he sets little store by female rule. Presumably, then, Mary's real importance lay in her capacity to provide a male heir to the Scottish throne.

2. Ibid., ll. 23-8.

I traist to se gude reformatione  
 From tyme we gett ane faithfull prudent king  
 Quhilk knawis the treuth and his vocatione.  
 All publicanis, I traist, he wyll doun thring,  
 And will nocht suffer in his realme to ring  
 Corrupt Scrybis, nor fals Pharisians,  
 Agane the treuth quhilk planely doith maling:  
 Tyll that kyng cum we mon tak paciens.<sup>1</sup>

Quite clearly, Lindsay remained unwilling or unable to divest himself of the image of the ideal prince which dominates and informs all his poetry. If it is godliness rather than the more conventional secular virtues which is stressed in his later works, this marks a change in emphasis rather than of outlook or assumption. Having diagnosed Scotland's ills, Lindsay could offer no remedy for the commonweal of the realm save godly kingship. Meanwhile, in the latter's continued absence, he could advocate only patience in anticipation of its eventual realization or, failing that, patience in anticipation of the final advent of the King of Kings.

### III

In many respects, the foregoing analysis has portrayed Lindsay as a transitional figure mediating between the political assumptions embedded in the traditional language of the commonweal and the novel expectations generated by exposure to Protestant modes of thought. Thus, while he never wholly abandoned the language of the commonweal, towards the end of his life Lindsay did endow this established mode of discourse with new religious and at least implicitly Protestant overtones. Latterly, one might say, his abiding preoccupation with good

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1. Ibid., ll. 2605-12.



kingship was transformed into a desire for godly kingship. In a sense, therefore, although Lindsay's theological allegiance remained imprecise, it is fair to interpret his later writings as going some way towards Protestantizing the language of the commonweal and thus adding new meanings and a new religious dimension to the political vocabulary habitually employed by sixteenth century Scots. That said, it is tempting to go further and to see Lindsay as a key figure in a process whereby Protestantism was made familiar and acceptable to the Scots by the simple expedient of reinterpreting the normative ideas of kingship and the commonweal to encompass the related, but overtly Protestant ideals of godly kingship and a godly commonwealth. In the long term, in fact, such alterations and accretions to the established meanings of crucial terms in the Scottish political vocabulary may well have contributed to the eventual triumph of Protestantism within Scotland. However, just as it is no longer wise to assume that the Scottish Reformation was the product of rising and ultimately irresistible support for Protestantism, so it would be equally unwise to assume that the Scots spoke a progressively more Protestant version of the language of the commonweal. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that commonweal language as spoken by the majority of Scots did not acquire a markedly Protestant accent until the reign of James VI. Meanwhile, in the public discourse of the 1550's and 1560's - critical decades in the history of Scottish Protestantism - the idea of the commonweal tended rather to militate against the spread of the reformed faith and to act, not as a vehicle for the new opinions, but as a considerable obstacle in their road.

The reasons for this are not hard to find and are in fact implicit in much that has been said in previous chapters. Essentially, the ideological problem faced by Scottish Protestants is reducible to the fact that the language of the commonweal - stressing, as it did, the freedom of the realm as symbolized by the exercise of independent kingship - was hardly available for use by a movement which was not only closely identified with England, but which was also opposed by the reigning Scottish sovereign. Had Scotland undergone a magisterial reformation such as occurred in England - a reformation initiated by the prince and free of external interference - then, and perhaps then only, could the religious revolution have been conceptualized in terms of the commonweal in the manner sign-posted by Lindsay and eventually popularized during the reign of James VI. As it was, however, Scotland's Reformation was initiated from below against the wishes of the Regent Mary of Guise and her daughter Mary Queen of Scots and was pushed through and made safe, not by overwhelming popular demand, but by the timely intervention and continuing support of the English government. Clearly, a rebellion against constituted authority undertaken under English auspices could not readily be legitimated by reference to the commonweal of the realm as generally understood by the Scottish political community at large. Indeed, as we shall see, when in the crisis of 1559 the leaders of the Protestant Congregation did employ this mode of justification, it seems to have had little more affect on their fellow Scots than when the assured lords of the 1540's adopted the precise same ploy. Fear of English domination remained, as it had always been, a paramount feature of Scottish political thinking and, however much the Congregation sought to deny it, the public perception of them as the catspaw of English ambitions remained strongly



entrenched. Nor was such a view entirely without foundation, for the Congregation were the natural heirs of the unionist ideology of the 1540's and many of their leaders were heavily committed to the vision of a Protestant and imperial British realm promulgated by Henrysone and Somerset. With the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558, the dynastic union of Scotland and England became once again a consummation devoutly wished for by many of Scotland's leading Protestants.

Meanwhile, however, for much of the 1550's, such ideals were necessarily pushed to the background in the face of the much more immediate problem of Protestantism's very survival, not just in Scotland, but also in England. Mary of Guise's seizure of the Scottish regency in 1554, following hard on the heels of the death of Edward VI and the accession of the Catholic Mary Tudor, dealt heavy blows to Protestant aspirations and put paid, at least for a time, to any hopes of godly kingship. Under these adverse circumstances, there not surprisingly emerged a rather different Protestant ideology which was concerned, not to sanction union, but initially to protect the faithful from persecution and ultimately to justify resistance to the persecutor. This radical ideology, while by no means incompatible with the vision of a united Britain, was far removed from Lindsay's wistful pining for a godly prince and went far beyond his admonition that 'Tyll that kyng cum we mon tak paciens'. Based on a covenant with God rather than the commonweal of the realm, it was the militant creed of a persecuted minority who were no longer prepared to tarry for the magistrate. As we shall see, it was in terms of this covenanting ideology that the Protestant Congregation of Scotland were to launch their rebellion against the Catholic authorities in 1559. To grasp

its main features and implications, however, we must look first of all to the writings of the Congregation's spiritual and political mentor. For it was John Knox who proved the most forceful and influential proponent of the covenanting theory of armed resistance.



Part III

REFORMATION AND RESISTANCE

## Chapter Eight

Knox, the Covenant and the Congregation

In April 1547, in a scene neatly encapsulating many of the various and contradictory intellectual currents of mid-sixteenth century Scotland, John Knox preached his first public sermon in the parish church of St. Andrews to an audience which included both John Mair and Sir David Lindsay. The reaction of neither of the latter is recorded, but Lindsay at least, who had been instrumental in persuading Knox to preach, was probably not displeased with the performance. It has been suggested, in fact, that it was Knox's apocalyptic interpretation of Daniel 7 and his prophetic denunciation of the Roman Antichrist which inspired the poet to write his Monarchie.<sup>1</sup> Whether that is the case or not, however, it is certainly tempting to see Knox's first entry into public life, in the presence of such distinguished auditors, as symbolizing a watershed in the development of sixteenth century Scottish political thought. For although there is much in Knox's thinking which links him with these representatives of an earlier era, there is much too which marks him off from them and heralds the advent of quite new and unfamiliar modes of thought and discourse. His sermon itself, for example, as direct in its attack on Roman idolatry as it was in its exposition of reformed theology, was markedly more radical than anything penned by the more cautious Lindsay. As some of the congregation aptly put it: 'Otheris sned

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1. Katharine R. Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain (Oxford, 1979), 118. Cf. Brother Kenneth, 'Sir David Lindsay, Reformer', Innes Review, I (1950), 79-91, at 80f.



[= lop] the branches of the Papistrie, but he [= Knox] stryckis at the roote, to destroye the hole'.<sup>1</sup> His sermon was couched, moreover, in a language of prophecy whose self-righteous vehemence Lindsay the satirist would not have sought to emulate. If Lindsay was first and foremost an urbane courtier, Knox was above all an inspired prophet, convinced from the very outset that he had been especially called by God to announce and to help implement the divine will. It was this sense of his prophetic vocation which was to guide, drive and inspire Knox throughout his career as a reformed preacher and it is only in the light of it that both his personality and his politics become fully comprehensible. Consequently, if we are to understand Knox the political ideologue - the proponent, in particular, of a theory of armed resistance - we must first come to terms with Knox the prophet.<sup>2</sup>

## I

Although a Protestant of some years standing by 1547, there was little in Knox's background to suggest that as a self-styled instrument of God he was destined soon to wield considerable influence over the course of the Reformation in Scotland. In fact, we know next to nothing about his early life, not least because he seems deliberately to

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1. The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing (Wodrow Society, 1846-64), i, 192.
  2. What follows in this chapter is an expanded and much revised version of my 'Knox, Resistance and the Moral Imperative', History of Political Thought, I (1980-81), 411-36. For further discussions of the nature and development of Knox's political views, see in particular John R. Gray, 'The Political Theory of John Knox', Church History, VIII (1939), 132-42; J. H. Burns, 'The Political Ideas of the Scottish Reformation', Aberdeen University Review, XXXVI (1955-56), 251-68; and the same author's 'John Knox and Revolution 1558', History Today, VIII (1958), 565-73.

have suppressed those years before his conversion to the reformed faith.<sup>1</sup> Even the date of his birth - c.1514 - is conjectural, while all one can say about his education is that he probably attended St. Andrews University in the early 1530's and that John Mair was probably among his teachers there. There is no record of his graduating, but Knox did take holy orders in the later 1530's and, apparently unable to obtain a benefice, eked out a living as a public notary and a tutor to the children of the gentry. The date of his conversion to Protestantism is similarly obscure, but it must have occurred in the early 1540's as Knox was closely involved with the ministry of George Wishart who returned to Scotland, as we have seen, in the company of the English commissioners sent to negotiate the Treaty of Greenwich in 1543. As a Protestant Anglophile, Wishart inevitably fell foul of Cardinal Beaton and it was probably fear of suffering a fate similar to his which drove Knox to take refuge in 1547 in St. Andrews castle. For there he joined the band of Protestant lairds who had avenged Wishart's death by assassinating the cardinal and who were now under siege vainly awaiting relief from England. It was in these inauspicious surroundings, during a prolonged armistice, that Knox preached his first sermon. According to his own account, however, he did so only reluctantly, at first refusing to 'ryne whare God had nott called

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1. Although there is no shortage of studies of Knox's life, none can be considered definitive. Among the best modern biographies are Eustace Percy, John Knox (2nd. edtn., London, 1964); Jasper Ridley, John Knox (Oxford, 1968); and W. Stanford Reid, Trumpeter of God : A Biography of John Knox (New York, 1974). These, however, supplement rather than supersede older works such as P. Hume Brown, John Knox (Edinburgh, 1895).



him'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it was only when publicly summoned in the face of the congregation and after several days of lonely soul-searching that the conscientious Protestant became convinced that this was a 'lauchfull vocation' which he could not deny. Once assured of the legitimacy of his calling, however, Knox threw caution to the winds and delivered a sermon which was electrifying in its effects. As he later recorded in his History, some of his audience opined that 'Maister George Wishart spak never so plainely, and yitt he was brunt : evin so will he be'. This was a threat of which Knox - the disciple of the martyred Wishart - was certainly cognizant, but both then and subsequently he had no choice but to live with it. For on that momentous occasion in St. Andrews, he believed that he had not simply been summoned by a congregation, but that he had been directly called by God Himself. If a reluctant Knox had had his vocation thrust upon him, Protestantism had had a clamorous and uncompromising prophet thrust upon it.

It was this acute sense of being singled out by God through the agency of the congregation which was to remain for Knox the basis of and sanction for the public and highly censorious role which he subsequently assumed. Throughout his career - initially in Edwardian England, then in continental exile and finally back in his native Scotland - it was his sense of vocation which provided the ultimate

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1. For this and what follows, see Knox's own extended account of the circumstances of his calling in Works, i, 185-93. The significance of his initial sense of vocation and the psychological 'crisis' which precipitated his decision to preach are interestingly (albeit speculatively) discussed in Pierre Janton, John Knox : l'homme et l'oeuvre (Paris, 1967), 65-71.

source of legitimacy for his public actions and utterances. In December 1562, for example, when Mary Stewart rebuked him for openly criticizing her excessive indulgence in the dance, the preacher defended himself by declaring that: 'I am called, Madam, to ane public function within the kirk of God and am appointed by God to rebuk the synnes and vices of all'.<sup>1</sup> Nor must the apparent pettiness of Mary's transgression be allowed to obscure the largeness of Knox's vision. He identified his vocation with that of the Old Testament prophets, with Amos, Ezechiel and particularly Jeremiah, and was in no doubt either of his own status as a prophet or of the source and nature of his special powers. In 1566, in the preface to his only published sermon, he wrote:

I dare not denie (lest that in so doing I should be injurious to the giver), but that God hath revealed unto me secretes unknowne to the worlde; and also that he made my tong a trumpet, to forwarne realmes and nations, yea, certaine great personages, of translations and chaunges, when no such things were feared, nor yet was appearing ...

He made no bones of the fact that he was indeed God's 'trumpet', literally conveying the message 'of him who commanded me to cry'. In the same sermon, for example, he declared that:

... in the publike place I consulte not with flesh and bloud what I shall propone to the people, but as the Spirit of my God who hath sent me, and unto whome I must answere, moveth me, so I speake; and when I have once pronounced threatnings in His name (howe unpleasant so ever they be to the world), I dare no more deny them, then I dare deny that God hath made me his messinger, to forwarne the inobedient of their assured destruction.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Knox, Works, ii, 334.

2. Ibid., vi, 229-31.



A preacher and a prophet, God's trumpet and His messenger, Knox's public function was to proclaim the law of God and to warn the disobedient of the fearful consequences of their iniquity. In the presence of manifest sinfulness, he confided in his mother-in-law Mrs. Bowes, 'I am compellit to thounder out the threattyningis of God aganis obstinat rebellaris'.<sup>1</sup> As this suggests, it was an essentially minatory role which Knox felt called upon to perform. Not surprisingly, moreover, he tended to admonish, threaten and thunder with an intensity and rhetorical vehemence proportionate to the adversity he faced. Thus, exiled from England by the Marian persecution, he indulged in an orgy of prophetic denunciation quite unrestrained in its violent abuse of the Catholic establishment. Yet if his identification with the Old Testament prophets was only fully realized in the period of his exile, it was clearly foreshadowed during his years in Edwardian England and firmly rooted in the conviction - dating from 1547 - that he was indeed a chosen instrument of God.<sup>2</sup> It was this belief, as unshakable in its foundations as it was momentous in its ramifications, which underwrote and legitimated the public persona of the prophet.

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1. Ibid., iii, 338.

2. Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints : A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (London, 1966), 92ff, tends to overestimate the effects of exile in 'alienating' and 'emancipating' the preachers from traditional norms and thus freeing them to function as the prophets of God. For a useful corrective demonstrating that 'the trumpet blasts of the prophet had already been domesticated within the Edwardian establishment', see Paul M. Little, 'John Knox and English Social Prophecy', Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England, XIV (1970), 117-27.

If, however, it was his sense of vocation which legitimated Knox's prophetic utterances, it was conscience and the knowledge of God's truth which compelled him to loose them on an ungodly and degenerate world. Indeed, they left him no choice, for were he to do otherwise, 'then suld I do aganis my conscience, as also aganis my knowlege, and so suld I be guiltie of the blude of thame that perischeth for lack of admonitioun'.<sup>1</sup> As a prophet - as 'one whom God placeth watchman over his people and flocke ... whose eyes he doth open and whose conscience he pricketh to admonishe the ungodlie'<sup>2</sup> - it was Knox's inescapable duty to proclaim the divine law as it was vouchsafed to him through his special knowledge of God and His Word. In particular, impelled by conscience and the assurance of God's truth, Knox felt duty bound to denounce what he saw as the unholy corruption of the Roman mass and to warn those who participated in it of their certain and imminent destruction. 'In religioun thair is no middis', he declared in 1556, 'either it is the religioun of God, and that in everie thing that is done it must have the assurance of his awn Word ... or els it is the religioun of the Divill, whilk is, when men will erect and set up to God sic religioun as pleaseth thame'.<sup>3</sup> The mass, insisted Knox, fell squarely and irretrievably into the latter category. Manifestly, he argued, it was a purely human invention without scriptural warrant and ipso facto an idolatrous ceremony repugnant to the divine law he had been called to proclaim. As he explained it syllogistically in 1550: 'All wirschipping, honoring, or service

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1. Knox, Works, iii, 168.

2. Ibid., iv, 371.

3. Ibid., iv, 232.



inventit by the braine of man, without his own express commandement, is Idolatrie : The Mass is inventit be the braine of man, without any commandement of God : Thairfoir, it is Idolatrie'.<sup>1</sup> The substance of this simple syllogism was the watchword and warcry of all Knox's ministerial labours. It formed, for example, the basis of his implacable hostility to Mary Stewart in the 1560's, just as it was a central contention of the dispute with Prior John Winram which followed hard on the heels of his first sermon. Inevitably also, during the period of the Marian reaction, the mass became both the focus of Knox's most profound 'spiritual hatred',<sup>2</sup> and the object of his most vivid prophetic denunciations. After all, as God's servant and watchman, he was bound in conscience to warn his flock of the hideous consequences of participating in what he was assured to be the most perverted ceremony of an Antichristian church. 'For so odious and abominable I knaw the Masse to be in Godis presence', he had written in 1550, 'that unles ye declyne from the same, to lyfe can ye never atteane. And thairfoir, Brethrenne, flie from that Idolatrie, rather than from the present death'.<sup>3</sup> With the accession of a Catholic sovereign to the throne of England, such categorical advice was to strike home with terrifying realism among those conscientious Protestants who, unlike

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1. Ibid., iii, 34.

2. Writing of the persecution his flock was suffering at the hands of tyrants and idolaters, Knox advised on one occasion that: 'we may not hate them with a carnal hatred; that is to say, only because they trouble our bodyes : For there is a spiritual hatred, which David calleth a perfecte hatred, whyche the Holy Ghoste engendereth in the hartes of Godis elect, against the rebellious contemners of his holy statutes' (ibid., iii, 244-5).

3. Ibid., iii, 69-70.

Knox, were in no position to seek safety and solace in continental exile.

Indeed, for those who remained in England, Mary Tudor's accession, and the Catholic reaction she initiated, created an agonizing dilemma. For it posed in the acutest possible way the problem of whether - to adopt Knoxian phraseology - the allegiance of the faithful was owed in the first place to the commands of God or to those of man. To Knox himself, of course, such a dilemma was amenable to only one solution. 'Goddes Worde draweth his electe after it', he declared, 'against worldlye appearaunce, agaynst natural affections, and agaynst cyvil statutes and constitutions'.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in 1554, during his first year in exile, he wrote several letters to his erstwhile congregations in England whose leading theme was the absolute necessity 'as ye purpois and intend to avoyd Godis vengeance' of eschewing, 'as well in bodie as in spreit, all fellowship and societie with Idolateris in thair idolatrie'.<sup>2</sup> In other words, he remained wholly obdurate in his opposition to the mass and flatly refused to entertain any thought of occasional conformity as a means of easing the plight of his brethren in England. On the contrary, he steadfastly insisted that the only course open to them was outright disobedience to the civil power in all things repugnant to the law of God.

If such an uncompromising stance was fairly predictable, however, the main argument which Knox deployed in its support was not. For it was in this context that he made use for the first time of an idea which

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1. Ibid., iii, 312-3.

2. Ibid., iii, 166.



was subsequently to play a major role in the development of his political thought. That is, he now based his opposition to the mass, not simply on the grounds of its incongruity with Scripture, but more compellingly on the assertion that to participate in it was irrevocably to violate 'the league and covenant of God' which 'requyreis that we declare our selves enemyis to all sortis of ydolatrie'.<sup>1</sup>

Reformulated in these terms, the avoidance of idolatry was transformed from a simple scriptural precept into a clause in a formal 'contract' drawn up between God and the elect. Moreover, by implication, just as the reward for fulfilling the terms of the covenant was eternal salvation, so the penalty for their infraction was eternal damnation.

Needless to say, in the context of the mid-1550's, such an arrangement was fraught with terrible significance for Knox's persecuted brethren in England. For it subjected them to conditions which they fulfilled only in the face of physical intimidation, but which they ignored at the risk of spiritual damnation. The exiled preacher was, of course, neither unaware of nor unconcerned at their dilemma, but (conscientious as ever) he could do no other than spell out the exacting terms of the covenant:

This is the league betuixt God and us, that He alone sall be our God, and we salbe his pepill : He sall communicat with us of his graces and goodness; We sall serve him in bodie and spreit : He salbe our saifgard frome death and dampnatioun; We sall seik to him, and sall flie frome all strange Godis. In making whilk league, solemnedlie we sweir never to haif fellowship with ony religioun, except with that whilk God hath confirmit be his manifest Word.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., iii, 193.

2. Ibid., iii, 190-1.

The avoidance of idolatry had become for Knox a divine injunction upon which depended both the subsistence of the covenant and thereby the salvation of the elect. It represented a simple test of faith: a choice between allegiance to the fantastic inventions of man's corrupt mind or to the will of God as revealed in the Word. When, therefore, the laws of man contradicted the law of God, when obedience to man was tantamount to rebellion against God, Knox had no doubt which was the sovereign authority. By the terms of the covenant, the faithful had no choice - regardless of all worldly ties - but to comply with the imperatives of the divine will. In effect, in the context of Mary Tudor's reign, the covenant rendered civil disobedience a precondition of salvation.

It is worth pausing at this point to consider Knox's understanding of the covenant in more detail. For although the idea was by no means original to him, his use of it, despite or rather because of his lack of theological sophistication, was particularly effective.<sup>1</sup> Not only, for example, did it serve as a biblically sanctioned means of formulating the precise nature of the relationship between God and the elect, but its contractual basis lent it a cutting edge of terrifying acuity. For spurning the niceties of Calvinist theology, Knox was insisting that, however freely God gave of His grace, man might still

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1. For a discussion of Knox's understanding of the covenant and of his possible sources, see Richard L. Greaves, 'John Knox and the Covenant Tradition', Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XXIV (1973), 23-32. As Greaves points out (pp.24-5), the conditionality of Knox's covenant was 'theologically impossible' in the light of his 'doctrines of predestination and perseverance'. For Calvin's rather different views on the subject, see Wilhelm Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, trans. Harold Knight (London, 1956), Ch.6.



prejudice his election by breaking the terms of the covenant. Conversely, therefore, outward conformity to the terms of the 'contract' was a necessary precondition - although certainly not incontrovertible proof - of individual salvation. In other words, formulated in this crudely conditional way, the covenant had built into it a system of reward and punishment of apocalyptic dimensions. For just as obedience to the divine law 'is the cause why God schawis his mercie upon us, why he multiplyis us, and dois embrace us with fatherlie lufe and affectioun', so by disobeying His precepts, 'by consenting to ydolatrie, by haunting or favouring of the samyn, are the merceis of God schut up frome us, and we cutt off from the body of Chryst, left to wither and rotte as treis without sap or moysture'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in Knox's view, to contravene the terms of the covenant was so to rouse 'the wraith of God, that it is never quenchit till the offenderis, and all that they possess, be destroyit from the earth'.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, he was adamant that, in order that the promise of salvation might continue to subsist, the faithful must unhesitatingly deery idolatry and thereby, at least in the England of the 1550's, defy authority. As we shall see, however, although this line of argument thrust the covenant firmly into the political arena, Knox did not initially view forcible resistance to ungodly rule as one of its terms. Thus far obedience to

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1. Knox, Works, iii, 193.

2. Ibid., iii, 193; cf. p.190: 'As it is maist profitabill for bodie and saull to avoyd ydolatrie, so is it necessarie, that onless so we do, we refuse to be in league with God, we schaw our selves to haif no faith, and we deny to be witnessis unto God, and to his treuth; and so must he, of his Justice, expressit in his Word, deny us to pertene to him or his kingdome. And then, allace! what ellis is the haill lyfe of man but ane heip of misereis, leiding suche as ar not in league with God to dampnation perpetuall'.

the divine will did not dictate the complete destruction of an idolatrous regime. Nevertheless, when formulated in terms of a binding contract and reinforced with apocalyptic sanctions, the injunction to obey God rather than man represented a formidable and potentially uncontrollable challenge to power structures founded on human rather than biblical precepts. Not surprisingly, therefore, just as Knox had effectively politicized the covenant, so it was on the authority of the covenant that he would finally radicalize his politics.

Before discussing the development of his theory of resistance, however, it is necessary to consider certain other aspects of Knox's thought. For despite the uncompromising nature of his covenanting ideology - an ideology characteristically articulated in a language of stark imperatives - there was nevertheless nothing inevitable about his eventual proclamation of the duty of a covenanted people forcibly to resist an idolatrous sovereign. On the contrary, contemporary interpretation of Scripture, among Protestants as well as Catholics, militated strongly against the development of any theory of resistance to constituted authority. After all, if according to Acts 5 allegiance was owed to the laws of God rather than of man, so according to Romans 13 the powers that be were ordained by God and whoever resisted them resisted the ordinance of God and would suffer damnation. The latter Pauline injunction was one of the most influential biblical precepts of the age and, beyond advocating a policy of passive disobedience in all things repugnant to the law of God, Knox was not initially in a position to gainsay it. It was only gradually that he learned how to reinterpret St. Paul's famous dictum in such a way as to admit the possibility - or rather the duty - of armed resistance to an ungodly or idolatrous prince. Moreover, he did so only with



significant reservations, for to have admitted the general principle of resistance would have been to provide also the ideological means of challenging those very powers to whom he looked for the imposition of godly rule. No radical antinomian fired by an anarchic social vision, Knox's prime aim was rather the establishment of a godly commonwealth ruled in strict accordance with the law of God. In other words, it was against the background of a Calvinist ideal of a severely disciplined society, a society in which obedience to the temporal power was of paramount importance, that Knox sought to develop a theory of resistance. To understand his dilemma, however, we must look more closely at his conception of kingship and the part which he assigned to the prince in the regulation of a Christian polity.

## II

At least in some respects, Knox's conception of kingship is not dissimilar to that with which we are already so familiar. Like Lindsay, Mair or Boece, for example, he too believed that a prince should display those virtues conventionally deemed appropriate to his high office and that his prime responsibility lay in the equitable administration of justice. Indeed, writing to Mary of Guise in 1556, he explicitly conflated his own expectations of kingship with those which were the commonplaces of his age:

An orator, and Goddes messinger also, justlye mighte requyre of you (nowe by Goddes hande promoted to hye dignitie) a motherly pitie uppon your subjects, a justice inflexible to be used against murtherers and common oppressours, a hart voyde of avarice and partialitie, a mynd studiouse and carefull for maintenance of that realme and common wealth above whiche God hath placed you, and by it hath made you honorable; with the rest of

the virtues whiche not onely Goddes Scriptures,  
but also wryters illuminated onely with the <sup>1</sup>  
light of nature, requyreth in godlye rulers.

Aside from its reference to God's messenger, there is nothing in this passage with which the writers we have previously considered could have quarrelled. Yet it must be admitted that this is in fact a rather unusual passage and that Knox, however familiar he was with the writings of those 'illuminated only with the light of nature', rarely deviated from biblical precept and precedent to comment on their works. Nor on this occasion did he do so without a purpose. For Knox enumerated the duties conventionally seen as the essence of kingship only to dismiss them as secondary to the more fundamental requirement that the prince maintain and protect the Protestant religion. Thus, in the very next sentence, he informed Mary of Guise that 'vayn it is to crave reformation in manners where the religion is corruptit' and then went on to cite those 'moste godly princes Josias, Ezechias and Josaphat' who, seeking God's favour for themselves and their peoples, 'before all thinges began to reforme the religion'.<sup>2</sup> While it would be misleading, therefore, to construe Knox's thought as antipathetic to the traditional typology of royal virtue, there is nevertheless no doubt either that his over-riding concern was with the prince's duties to religion or that his paradigm of godly kingship was derived essentially from biblical sources. Not unexpectedly in a prophet of God, Knox

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1. Ibid., iv, 81.

2. Ibid., iv, 81-2. Josiah, Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat were Knox's favourite examples of godly kingship and he refers to them on several other occasions (see, e.g., *ibid.*, iv, 173, 398, 486f); they are mentioned also in the chapter 'Of the Civile Magistrat' in the Scottish Confession of Faith of 1560 (see *ibid.*, ii, 118-9).



subordinated all else to a fundamental religious imperative and viewed the role of the temporal power almost exclusively in religious terms.

In the course of defending himself and his Calvinist brethren from the taint of Anabaptism, Knox at one point declared that: 'We neither prively nor openly denie the power of the Civile Magistrate ... Onely we desire the people and the Rulers to be subject unto God, and unto his holy will plainly reveled in his most sacred Worde'.<sup>1</sup> In this deceptively simple statement, Knox articulated the essence of the Calvinist ideal of a Christian polity ruled in strict accordance with the law of God as revealed in Scripture. It was an ideal with profound implications regarding the nature and exercise of secular authority.<sup>2</sup> For unlike Luther, who had rejected civil society as superfluous to spiritual well-being, Calvin and his followers actively sought to integrate the two in the interests of a Christian virtue circumscribed and promoted by means of a biblically sanctioned code of moral discipline. Temporal power was not for them, as it was for Luther, little more than a pis aller necessary only to ensure the maintenance of civil peace and order. On the contrary, in the words of Knox, magistrates were entrusted with the sword, not only that they might punish such offences as 'troubleth the tranquillitie and quiet estat of the common wealth ...', but also such vices as openly impugne

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1. Ibid., v, 463.

2. For fuller discussions of this to which what follows is greatly indebted, see Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought (London, 1961), Ch.6; and Walzer, Revolution of the Saints, Ch.2.

the glorie of God, as idolatrie, blasphemie, and manifest heresie ...'.<sup>1</sup> It simply was not the case, he insisted, 'that the Civile Magistrate hath nothing to do in matters of religion'. In fact, he went on, a ruler's primary duty was to 'provide that Goddes true religion should be kept inviolated of the people and flock, which by God was committed to his charge'.<sup>2</sup> Secular power was, in effect, an instrument ordained by God both for the establishment of the 'true religion' and thereafter for the enforcement of godly discipline. As this suggests, however, fully to understand the role of the civil magistrate in the Calvinist polity, we must first look more closely at the crucial concept of discipline.

In the Geneva Form of Prayer of 1556, prepared by Knox and others for the English congregation at Geneva and adopted in Scotland in 1565, discipline is described as the 'synewes in the bodie which knit and joyne the membres together with decent order and comelynes' and as 'an ordre left by God unto his Church, wherby men learne to frame their wills and doinges accordinge to the lawe of God'.<sup>3</sup> In essence, ecclesiastical discipline was a means of enforcing the divine law as revealed in the Ten Commandments - that law which was of itself, as Knox put it, 'a brydill that did let and stay the rage of externall

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1. Knox, Works, iv, 398; cf. the Scottish Confession of Faith (1560): '... to Kingis, Princes, Reullaris, and Magistratis, we affirme that cheiflie and maist principallie the reformatioun and purgatioun of the Religioun apperteanes; so that not onlie thei ar appointed for civile policey, but also for maintenance of the trew Religioun, and for suppressing of idolatrie and supersticioun whatsoever ...' (ibid., ii, 118).
  2. Ibid., iv, 486-7.
  3. Ibid., iv, 203.



wickitnes in many, and was a scholmaister also that led unto Chryst'.<sup>1</sup> The strict enforcement of this law was made necessary by fallen man's utter sinfulness and corruption. In common with Calvinists generally, for example, Knox believed that, while the Word and the Sacraments might be sufficient to bind together the invisible community of the elect, it was discipline, the third mark of the true church, which was essential for the regulation of that visible church on earth where hypocrites abounded and the elect and reprobate mingled indistinguishably.<sup>2</sup> Through mutual censure and correction in accordance with the law, Calvin and his followers believed that they could not only control the excesses of man's degenerate nature, but actually promote and release Christian virtue.<sup>3</sup> They could do so effectively, however, only in conjunction with a civil magistracy competent to redirect the coercive powers of secular institutions to accord with and enforce the jurisdiction of the church. It was presumably for this reason that, as early as 1537, Calvin requested the Genevan authorities to ensure that the citizenry subscribed a solemn covenant binding them both to a confession of faith and to certain articles regarding the organization of their church.<sup>4</sup> From his earliest days in Geneva, Calvin

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1. Ibid., iv, 101-2.

2. The Confession of Faith (1560), like the Geneva Form of Prayer, groups discipline along with the preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments as the three 'nottis, signes, and assured tokenis' of the true church (ibid., ii, 110; cf. iv, 172-3). There was, however, some doubt as to the status of discipline and Calvin himself, although never denying its supreme importance, did not accord it the same priority as the Word and the Sacraments; see Francois Wendel, Calvin : The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought, trans. Philip Mairét (London, 1963), 300-1; cf. Gordon Donaldson, The Scottish Reformation (Cambridge, 1960), 78-9.

3. Wendel, Calvin, 298f.

4. See T. H. L. Parker, John Calvin : A Biography (London, 1975), 62-5.

realized that the Christian polity which he envisaged could only be established and maintained with the full co-operation of the temporal power. The point was not lost on his followers : the authors of the Geneva Form of Prayer, for example, acknowledged that, 'besides this Ecclesiastical censure', there belonged to the church 'a politicall Magistrate, who ministreth to every man justice, defending the good and punishinge the evell; to whom we must rendre honor and obedience in all thinges, which are not contrarie to the Word of God'.<sup>1</sup>

That Knox was in substantial agreement with these views can be readily illustrated from what amounts to one of his most extended commentaries on the nature and purpose of political authority. Ironically, albeit quite deliberately, it occurs in the course of a sermon delivered in 1565 to an audience which included Mary Stewart's feckless consort, Henry, Lord Darnley.<sup>2</sup> The latter was far from impressed by the preacher's efforts, but Knox's succinct description of the powers and function of a godly prince is well worth paraphrasing here. Predictably, he began by asserting that 'it is neither birth, influence of starres, election of people, force of armes, nor, finally, what soever can be comprehended under the power of nature, that maketh the distinction betwixt the superior power and the inferior, or that doth establish the royall throne of kings'. On the contrary, he went on, the civil power is - as St. Paul had said - 'the onely and perfect ordinance of God, who willeth his power, terror, and Majestie in a parte, to shine in the thrones of Kings, and in the faces of Judges,

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1. Knox, Works, iv, 172-3.

2. For the relevant part of the sermon from which the following quotes are drawn, see *ibid.*, vi, 233-8.



and that for the profite and comfort of man'. Profit and comfort, however, would proceed only from the due exercise of discipline in accordance with the law of God. Accordingly, therefore, Knox declared that the prince's main function was:

to punishe vice and maintayne vertue, that men may live in such societie as before God is acceptable ... For such is the furious rage of man's corrupt nature, that unles severe punishment were appointed, and put in execution upon malefactours, better it were that man shoulde live among brute and wilde beastes than among men.

It was to counter this vision of fallen man, corrupted by sin but free of the constraints of discipline, that God required of kings both 'knowledge of his will revealed in his word' and an 'upright and willing minde to put in execution suche things as God commaundeth in his lawe, without declyning eyther to the right or left hande'. As this suggests, however, although the powers of the prince were necessarily extensive, they were emphatically not unlimited. For, concluded

Knox:

Kings ... have not an absolute power in their regiment what pleaseth them; but their power is limited by God's word : so that if they strike where God commaundeth not, they are but murderers; and if they spare when God commaundeth to strike, they and their throne are criminal and gilty of the wickednesse that aboundeth upon the face of the earth, for lacke of punishment.

As this makes clear, Knox's conception of political authority, like every other aspect of his thought, was dominated and controlled by an over-riding religious imperative. In his view, the temporal powers were ordained by God to uphold and implement the divine law as revealed in the Word. Above all, it was their function to add the essential

coercive edge to the Christian discipline which - at least in theory - bound together both the visible church and co-extensively the Christian polity. Indeed, in the absence of a godly magistrate fulfilling to the letter the duties inherent in his divinely instituted office, the godly commonwealth envisaged by Knox could be neither realized nor maintained.

It must be emphasized, however, that although Knox and his colleagues obviously ascribed to the civil magistrate a crucial role in the regulation of a Christian commonwealth, they did not invest him with control or authority over the church per se. It is not the case, in other words, that they envisaged or acknowledged a magisterial supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, they believed that ecclesiastical jurisdiction existed and could be exercised quite independently of the secular power. According to The First Book of Discipline (1560), for example, the church was empowered 'to draw the sword which of God she hath received' and to discipline its members - and ultimately to excommunicate them - without reference to the civil magistrate.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the reformers looked to the state to execute the church's wishes and decrees, but the latter's legitimacy rested on their conformity with the Word of God rather than on the authority

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1. Donaldson (Scottish Reformation, 134-5) has argued that the early Scottish reformers did recognize the supremacy of a godly prince, but this view is rightly challenged in James Kirk, 'The Politics of the Best Reformed Kirks': Scottish achievements and English aspirations in church government after the Reformation', Scottish Historical Review, LIX (1980), 22-53, at 31-2.
  2. The First Book of Discipline, ed. J. K. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1972), 167ff. See also The Ordoure of Excommunicatioun and of Publict Repentance used in the Church of Scotland (1569), reprinted in Knox, Works, vi, 447-70.



of the prince. In effect, the civil and ecclesiastical orders were seen as possessing complementary, but exclusive jurisdictions : while the aim of both was the maintenance of a Christian polity ruled in accordance with the law of God, the primary responsibilities of each lay in the temporal and spiritual spheres respectively.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably, in certain areas, demarcation lines remained ambiguous, thus helping to ensure that, in Scotland as in Geneva, the co-operation between church and state on which the reformers' ideals were founded would prove hopelessly elusive. Nevertheless, the independence of the church from secular control was clearly a principle well-known to Scottish reformers some time before Andrew Melville set out to defend it in the later 1570's.<sup>2</sup> Like Melville, moreover, his predecessors in Scotland seem also to have believed that, as a member of the church, the civil magistrate must himself submit to ecclesiastical discipline. 'To discipline must all the estates within this Realm be subject', proclaimed The First Book of Discipline, 'as well the Rulers, as they that are ruled'.<sup>3</sup> On this point, Knox himself was no less explicit : ministers, he wrote, must be 'so bolde in God's cause' that, even 'yf the King himself wolde usurpe any other autoritie in God's religion', they must first admonish him 'according to God's Worde' and, if need

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1. For a useful discussion of the reformers' ideas on the relationship between church and state, see the introduction to the First Book of Discipline, ed. Cameron, 62-7.

2. The continuity between the thought of the first and second generation of Scottish reformers has recently been stressed in the editor's introduction to The Second Book of Discipline, ed. James Kirk (Edinburgh, 1981), esp. 57-65, as well as in the same author's 'Politics of the Best Reformed Kirks'.

3. First Book of Discipline, ed. Cameron, 173.

be, subject him 'to the yoke of discipline'.<sup>1</sup> In a godly commonwealth, no-one - regardless of his status - could be exempted from ecclesiastical censure and rebuke. If the prince's duty was to defend and maintain the church, it was a church to which he himself belonged and to whose discipline he was obliged himself to submit.

Neither the independence of the ecclesiastical order nor the necessity of the civil power's submission to its discipline were ideas calculated to win the whole-hearted approval of sixteenth century monarchs. To cite an obvious example, James VI would react violently against such notions and condemn them as deliberate attempts to curtail the royal prerogative.<sup>2</sup> As should be clear by now, however, there was nothing inherently anti-monarchical in Knox's thought. His aim was not so much to diminish the powers of princes as to redefine them in accordance with the law of God. Indeed, given a godly prince dedicated to the maintenance of a godly commonwealth, Knox enjoined on the people as the imperative command of God, not simply obedience, but the utmost veneration. In the Scottish Confession of Faith, for example, drawn up by Knox and his ministerial colleagues in 1560, it was laid down that 'sic personis as are placed in authoritie are to be loved, honoured, feared, and holdin in most reverent estimatioun' and that 'sick as resist the Supreme power, (doing that thing which apperteanis to his charge,) do resist God's ordinance, and thairfoir

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1. Knox, Works, v, 519-20.

2. For one of his more outspoken tirades against the reformers' political views, see The Basilicon Doron of King James VI, ed. James Craigie (S.T.S., 1944-50), i, 73-83.



can not be guyltless'.<sup>1</sup> This was clearly meant as an endorsement of the Pauline injunction that the powers are ordained by God and should not be resisted, its purpose being to ensure unstinting obedience to those higher powers on whom depended the successful regulation of a godly commonwealth. At the same time, however, it was an endorsement of Romans 13 made only with a proviso - 'doing that thing which appertains to his charge' - which effectively limited the obligation to obey to those things which were not repugnant to the law of God. In other words, it was a formula which, while exacting unqualified obedience to godly rulers, made provision for a quite different response to an ungodly prince. It now remains only to be seen whether Knox believed that that response ought to be confined to passive disobedience or might take the much more radical form of active resistance.

It was the accession of Mary Tudor which first led Knox seriously to consider the extent of a Protestant community's political obligations towards a Catholic sovereign. As we have seen, his initial reaction to this eventuality was to argue that, by the terms of their covenant with God, the faithful were obliged to disobey their monarch in all things repugnant to the divine will. During his early years in exile, however, the preacher did not publicly advocate a policy of active resistance to her rule. On the contrary, he continued to adhere to a literal interpretation of Romans 13, thus conceding that

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1. See Knox, Works, ii, 118-9; cf. Knox's own statement, worthy of James VI himself, to the effect that: 'na power on earth is above the power of the Civill reular; that everie saule, be he Pope or Cardinall, aught to be subject to the higher Poweris. That thair commandementis, not repugnyng to Godis glorie and honour, aught to be obeyit, evin with great loss of temporall thingis' (ibid., iv, 324).

even Catholic powers were ordained by God - if only as a punishment for the sins of the elect - and could not therefore be resisted. Assuredly the faithful were obliged to eschew the mass, but equally they were advised 'that ye presume not to be revengers of your own cause, but that ye resigne over vengeance unto Him'.<sup>1</sup> Such a policy of passive non-resistance was probably as distasteful to Knox as it was unwelcome to his persecuted brethren in England. It was, however, the only option available to him so long as he chose to interpret the Pauline injunction literally. Non-resistance was, moreover, the stance advocated by the leading lights of the Calvinist church. Indeed, with its emphatic belief in the divine nature of authority and its anxiety to dissociate itself from the excesses of the radical Anabaptist sects, Calvinism was singularly ill-equipped to forge any justification for resistance in the early 1550's.<sup>2</sup> Knox, whose early adventure in the castle of St. Andrews was itself an act of forcible resistance, seems to have become more sensitive to these ideological constraints as he fell directly under Calvinist influence during his period of exile. For there is little doubt that, on his first arrival on the continent, the preacher was seriously contemplating the idea that the people of England were bound under the covenant, not simply

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1. Ibid., iii, 244.

2. It is, of course, true that Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion contains (in all its many editions) a passage suggesting that an inferior magistracy such as the Spartan Ephorite might resist in the name of the people; see J. Calvini Opera ... Omnia, ed. Wilhelm Baum et al. (Brunswick, 1863-1900), ii, col. 1116. Nevertheless, that apart, his writings reiterate time and again the duty of non-resistance as laid down in Romans 13. For a discussion of this point and of the Calvinists' consequent difficulty in legitimating resistance, see Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge, 1978), ii, 191-4.



to disobey, but actually to take up arms against their Catholic sovereign.

The way Knox's mind was working at this time is amply illustrated by the fact that, as early as March 1554, he was canvassing the leaders of the Swiss churches for their opinions on such questions as obedience 'to a Magistrate who enforces idolatry and condemns true religion', and as to whom 'must godly persons attach themselves in the case of a religious Nobility resisting an idolatrous Sovereign'. Equally, however, the conservative attitude of the Swiss reformers is readily apparent in Heinrich Bullinger's cautious replies to these queries. In response to the first, for example, while agreeing that obedience was owed to God rather than man, he went on to warn that 'other objects are often aimed at under the pretext of a just and necessary assertion or maintenance of right'. As to the second question, Bullinger preferred to leave it to 'the judgment of Godly persons ... well acquainted with all the circumstances', but once again he advised, 'above all things, that those causes may be removed on account of which hypocrites are predominant'. While not, therefore, precluding the possibility of resistance, Bullinger was evidently wary of the worldly motives which might lie behind it. It might be possible to legitimate rebellion in the cause of God and the Word, but there was need '... of much prayer, and much wisdom, lest by precipitancy and corrupt affections we should so act as to occasion mischief to many worthy persons'.<sup>1</sup> These were considerations of which Knox

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1. For the full text of Knox's questions and Bullinger's replies, see Knox, Works, iii, 221-6.

remained very much aware, his fear of what J. H. Burns has called 'political contamination'<sup>1</sup> making him wary of a forthright declaration of the duty to rebel and, as we shall see, imposing considerable strains on his future relations with the Protestant nobility of Scotland. Meanwhile, however, other replies to his questions, including those of Calvin himself, proved no more encouraging than Bullinger's.<sup>2</sup> In public, therefore, Knox continued to urge on his English brethren an orthodox policy of disobedience in all things repugnant to the law of God, but passive acceptance of, rather than active resistance to, any persecution that such a stance might bring upon them. As regards a more radical response to the Marian regime, the preacher hinted only - if ominously - that 'all is not lawfull nor just that is statute be Civill lawis, nether yet is everie thing syn befoir God, whilk ungodlie personis alledgeis to be treasone'. But this he would 'superceid to mair oportunitie'.<sup>3</sup>

If Knox was to elaborate a theory of resistance, however, he had clearly to overcome some formidable obstacles. Not only did he have to guard against the possibility of tainted motives masquerading under the cloak of religious zeal, but he had also to find a way of reconciling rebellion with the injunction to obey embodied in Romans 13. The former problem was a contingency about which the preacher could do little other than pray. The latter, however, was an ideological

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1. Burns, 'Political Ideas of the Scottish Reformation', 258.

2. There is no record of Calvin's direct response to Knox's questions, but in a letter to Bullinger dated 29th April, 1554, he expressed his agreement with the latter's answers (see Calvin, Opera Omnia, xv, col. 125).

3. Knox, Works, iii, 236.



question for which answers had already been found by an earlier generation of Protestant reformers. Knox, along with others of his fellow Calvinists, was to pick up these ideas in the later 1550's and eventually proclaim the duty of a covenanted people to resist an idolatrous sovereign. But the catalyst which seems to have prompted this final transformation in his thinking stemmed not from England, but from Scotland. Accordingly, therefore, it is to Knox's relations with the northern kingdom that we must now turn our attention.

### III

In the autumn of 1555, Knox returned to Berwick to marry the Englishwoman, Marjorie Bowes, to whom he had been betrothed before his flight to the continent. While there, he ventured on a more extensive tour of his native land, unvisited since the Castilian episode of 1547. He was astonished and elated at the reception he received. 'Gif I had not sene it with my eyis in my awn contrey, I culd not have beleivit it ...', he wrote ecstatically to Marjorie's mother, 'But the fervencie heir doith fer exceid all utheris that I have sene'.<sup>1</sup> Knox was doubtless exaggerating, but during his eight year absence in England and on the continent, the reformed faith had certainly won new adherents among the Scottish burgesses and lowland lairds. Although still by no means a national movement with widespread popular support, by the mid-1550's Protestantism was well

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1. Ibid., iv, 217.

established in those localities where, as we saw, George Wishart had been offered protection by such influential landowners as the earl of Glencairn and Sir John Erskine of Dun. It was, not surprisingly, in those same areas - Edinburgh, the Lothians, the Mearns and the West - that Knox's hastily improvised mission was concentrated.<sup>1</sup> For several months, until his return to Geneva in July 1556, he criss-crossed the country preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments to congregations assembled in the houses of sympathetic local gentry. The message he proclaimed was familiar : idolatry was to be avoided at all costs and those who had 'a zeall to godlynes' but made 'small scrupill to go to the Messe' were sternly advised of the enormity of their error.<sup>2</sup> There were to be no compromises with the imperatives of the divine will and, to ensure that his advice did not go unheeded, Knox even laid down firm guide-lines as to how the isolated congregations were to conduct themselves after his departure.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to estimate the impact of all this feverish activity. Certainly, as he preached mostly in private and to audiences already sympathetic to his cause, Knox can have done little to extend the existing narrow base of Protestant support. His rapid movement around the country, however, must have lent the scattered congregations a cohesion and sense of common purpose which they had never previously experienced. In the light of this, the real significance of Knox's mission may well lie in the fact that for the first time both he and

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1. For Knox's own account of his activities in Scotland at this time, see *ibid.*, i, 245-54. For Wishart's very similar itinerary, see above, p.220.

2. *Ibid.*, i, 247-8.

3. See 'A Letter of Wholesome Counsel', in *ibid.*, iv, 129-40.



the lay leaders of the localized Protestant communities became aware of the possibility of adding a concerted political dimension to what had hitherto been a somewhat haphazard spiritual movement.<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, perhaps the most crucial aspect of Knox's mission was his success in establishing contact with sympathetic members of the nobility. For it was these men - the future leaders or Lords of the Congregation - who were to turn the embryonic movement for reform into a significant political force. In canvassing for their support, Knox was simply pursuing what came to be the standard policy of Genevan Calvinism towards its dependent congregations throughout Europe.<sup>2</sup> After all, the sympathy of local landowners was as necessary to the very survival of embattled Calvinist communities as it was to the future success of any offensive action taken on their behalf. In Scotland, as in France and the Netherlands, demands for religious reform - no matter how wide-spread - would prove wholly ineffective without the active patronage of the nobility. Moreover, without the military leadership and resources of the aristocracy, no offensive action could be realistically contemplated. In securing the support of Lord James Stewart (the future Regent Moray), the earls of

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1. For two rather different views on the impact of Knox's mission, see Ridley, John Knox, 224ff, and Ian B. Cowan, The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland (London, 1982), 108-11 (also the same author's Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation [Historical Association Pamphlet, London, 1978], 20-2). While the former exaggerates the mission's importance, the latter minimizes it. My own interpretation pursues the via media.
  2. See, for example, R. M. Kingdon, Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France 1555-63 (Geneva, 1956), 56ff, where the activities of the Geneva Company of Pastors in relation to the French nobility are examined in some depth.

Glencairn and Argyll and of several of the lesser nobility, therefore, Knox lent political and military leverage as well as social respectability to the movement for reform. He had, in effect, laid the first foundations of the organized Protestant party which within a few years would embark on revolutionary courses.<sup>1</sup> If he still remained reticent as to whether God's law enjoined a military crusade against idolatry, the preacher had already gone some way towards organizing a covenanted people capable of implementing such a divine injunction.

Knox's reticence, however, may only have applied to his public utterances. It seems reasonable to assume that privately he did in fact broach the possibility of armed resistance with his noble allies during his sojourn in Scotland. Certainly, the nobility appeared to be acting according to some pre-arranged plan and with the foreknowledge of Knox's approval when in March 1557, only nine months after his departure, they wrote to the preacher (once again resident in Geneva) asking him to return to Scotland and assuring him that they were now prepared 'to jeopard lyffis and goodis in the forward setting of the glorie of God'.<sup>2</sup> After some hesitation, Knox responded to the

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1. The above analysis owes much to H. G. Koenigsberger, 'The Organization of Revolutionary Parties in France and the Netherlands during the Sixteenth Century', in his Estates and Revolutions : Essays in Early Modern European History (Ithaca and London, 1971), 224-52. Koenigsberger is conscious of the Scottish parallel but confines most of his comments thereon to footnotes.
  2. Knox, Works, i, 267-8 (the letter was signed by Lord James Stewart, the earls of Glencairn and Argyll and John Erskine of Dun). That the question of rebellion had been discussed during Knox's stay in Scotland is perhaps further suggested by a letter which the preacher wrote in 1558 in which he talked, possibly with reference to plans made in 1556, of 'the commoun actioun whilk befor was intended' (ibid., iv, 252).



call, but he had travelled only as far as Dieppe before he received further letters intimating that the nobility had changed their minds.<sup>1</sup> We will consider what lay behind these tergiversations in the following chapter; here it is necessary only to note Knox's own reaction to them. Not surprisingly, he was incensed and, on 27 October 1557, he wrote an indignant reply upbraiding his allies for their inconstancy and irresolution. More significantly in the present context, however, he added that he was ashamed and confounded by their lukewarm response after he had 'so far travelled in the mater, moving the same to the most godly and the most learned that this day we know to lyve in Europe, to the effect that I mycht have thare judgementis and grave counsalles, for assurance alsweall of your consciences as of myne, in all enterprises'.<sup>2</sup> This can only refer to the questions Knox had put to the Swiss churches in 1554. Furthermore, the cryptic reference to 'all enterprises' suggests not only that he was already seriously contemplating the possibility of an armed rebellion in Scotland, but that the fervency he had encountered there in 1555-6 had stilled the doubts raised by Bullinger's cautious replies. Knox had apparently been satisfied - albeit only temporarily - that the motives of the Scottish nobility were untainted by worldly considerations and that a godly rebellion would not be invalidated by base political machinations. All that was now required was a more secure ideological foundation for the principle of resistance itself.

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1. Ibid., i, 269.

2. Ibid., i, 269-70.

In fact, after leaving Scotland in 1556, Knox appears to have devoted a good deal of attention to the question of resistance, for within a couple of years he was to emerge with two quite different means of legitimating it. The more celebrated of these - although ideologically the lesser in importance - was made public early in 1558 in a long and tedious tract entitled The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.<sup>1</sup> A topical denunciation of those female Catholic tyrants, Mary of Guise and particularly Mary Tudor, its main contention was simply that nature and the Scriptures, both of which were revelations of the divine will, demanded the total exclusion of women from power. Accordingly, argued Knox, it was the bounden duty of the people of Scotland and especially of England to depose the 'monstres' who ruled over them, for any other course, including adherence to any oaths of obedience made to them, was 'nothing but plaine rebellion against God'.<sup>2</sup> Although its conclusion was certainly extreme, in terms of sixteenth century attitudes to women the premises on which the First Blast was based were hardly exceptional. Knox was merely articulating, albeit in his characteristic language of imperatives, a prejudice common among his contemporaries and one whose political implications he had himself had in mind

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1. See *ibid.*, iv, 349-420.

2. *Ibid.*, iv, 416. Although Knox was ostensibly addressing both Scotland and England, the First Blast is much less concerned with Mary of Guise than with the 'Cursed Jesabel of England', Mary Tudor. In fact, as we shall see in a moment, Knox made a crucial distinction in his Appellation between a covenanted England and an uncovenanted Scotland which, although not referred to in the First Blast, may well have helped to direct the full force of his venomous rhetoric in England's direction.



for several years.<sup>1</sup> It was not an argument, however, which was to commend itself to Protestants in either Scotland or England over the next few years. Indeed, with the accession of Elizabeth I only months later, the publication of the First Blast proved a positive embarrassment to those - including both Knox and the Lords of the Congregation - who were to look to the English queen for succour and support.<sup>2</sup> Of much more use to them was a second line of argument developed by Knox at about the same time. In fact, this alternative basis for resistance was first referred to by the preacher in his letter to the Scottish nobility of October 1557. It was set out much more fully, however, in the two manifestos which Knox issued hard on the heels of the First Blast. Before examining how his allies in Scotland reacted to his promptings, therefore, we must first look more closely both at The Appellation ... Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland and at A Letter Addressed to the Commonalty of Scotland.

While in Scotland in 1556, Knox was summoned to appear before an ecclesiastical commission in Edinburgh to answer a charge of heresy. The trial never took place, but shortly afterwards, once he had returned to Geneva, the Scottish bishops did condemn the preacher in absentia as a heretic. The Appellation against 'the cruell and iniust sentence

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1. 'Whether a female can preside over and rule a kingdom by divine right ...?' was one of the questions Knox put to the Swiss churches in 1554 (ibid., iii, 222-3). In a letter of 1556, he provided his own answer when he wrote that women who forgot their 'weaknes and inabilitie to rule' and assumed 'the offices whilk God hath assignit to mankynd onlie' would 'not eschaip the maledictioun of God' (ibid., iv, 228).

2. See below, chapter 9.

pronounced against him' was Knox's belated response to these proceedings.<sup>1</sup> Instead of appealing to the ecclesiastical hierarchy to reverse their decision, however, he chose to appeal to the nobility of Scotland to protect him from what he saw as the tyranny of the papistical clergy. He did so, moreover, on grounds which, without negating the authority of Romans 13, allowed him nevertheless to elaborate a fully-fledged theory of armed resistance. The key element in this theory was the perfectly simple idea that as St. Paul had said that the 'powers' (plural) were ordained by God, then there must exist in each kingdom alternative - albeit inferior - magistrates whose office was, like a king's, of divine institution and whose duties were, again like a king's, to punish the wicked and protect the innocent. The inferior magistrates of Scotland were, of course, the nobility and it was to them, therefore, as 'lawfull powers by God appointed', that Knox addressed his Appellation.<sup>2</sup> That his reasoning was squarely based on Romans 13 is clearly revealed by a passage in which, after quoting in full the appropriate verses, he went on to explain their implications for the Scottish nobility:

As the Apostle ... moste straitly commaundeth obedience to be geven to lawfull powers ... so dothe he assigne to the powers theyre offices, which be to take vengeance upon evil doers, to maintaine the well doers, and so to ministre and rule in theyr office, that the subjectes by them may have a benefite, and be praised in well doing. Now, if you be powers ordeined by God (and that I hope all men will graunte), then, by the plaine wordes of the Apostle, is the sworde geven unto you by God, for maintenance of the innocent, and for punyshment of malefactors.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Printed in full in Knox, Works, iv, 461-520.

2. Ibid., iv, 467.

3. Ibid., iv, 482.

Like a godly prince, in other words, the inferior magistrates were charged with the punishment of vice and maintenance of virtue. They, like he, were to wield the sword of justice in the cause of Christian discipline. Indeed, even when the superior power commanded the contrary, the inferior magistrates were bound to fulfil the function assigned to them by God. That being the case, Knox could - and did - go on to argue that a virtuous and God-fearing (i.e. Protestant) magistrate was duty bound to protect the innocent elect from a wicked and God-less (i.e. Catholic) prince. Moreover, from this position it was but a short step to the still more radical conclusion that those 'whome God hath raised upp to be Princes and Rulers ... whose handes he hath armed with the sword of his justice' were also 'appointed to be as bridels, to repressse the rage and insolencie of your Kings, whensoever they pretend manifestly to transgresse Goddes blessed ordenance'.<sup>1</sup> As this makes clear, it was a step which Knox now appeared quite prepared to take.

It was not a step, however, which the preacher could base solely on the expedient of pluralizing the Pauline maxim that the powers are ordained by God. Of itself, in fact, the idea of an inferior magistracy did nothing to counter the injunction to obey adumbrated in Romans 13. On the contrary, it seemed rather to confuse the issue by positing a plurality of powers to each and all of whom obedience was theoretically due. It was, of course, a palpable absurdity to invite a situation in which divinely ordained magistrates were opposed to a divinely ordained prince, both of whom were demanding obedience in

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1. Ibid., iv, 504.



accordance with the divine will. But how was such a scenario to be avoided without actually denying the Pauline doctrine that all the powers are ordained by God and should not be resisted? According to Knox, the solution lay in distinguishing between a prince acting according to God's ordinance and a prince acting, as it were, ultra vires. Thus, in the Appellation, when faced with the contention that the powers are to be obeyed 'be they good or be they bad', Knox retorted that:

... it is no lesse blasphemie to say, that God hath commaunded Kinges to be obeyed, when they commaund impietie, then to say, that God by his precept is auctour and mentainer of all iniquitie. True it is, God hath commaunded Kinges to be obeyed, but like true it is, that in things which they commit against his glorie, or when cruelly without cause they rage against theire brethren, the members of Christes body, he hath commaunded no obedience, but rather he hath approved, yea, and greatlie rewarded such as have opposed themselves to theyre ungodly commaundementes and blind rage ...<sup>1</sup>

Although not fully articulated here, Knox was clearly working on the assumption that there was a great difference between the power ordained by God and the person who happened to wield that power. As a divine ordinance, the former was by definition perfect and unchallengeable, but the latter was prone to all the imperfections stemming from man's fallen nature. At a later stage in his career, Knox was to make the distinction much more explicitly and to defend at length the proposition 'that the Prince may be resisted, and yit the ordinance of God

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1. Ibid., iv, 496.

nocht violatit'.<sup>1</sup> Already, however, he had seen its potential as a means of reconciling resistance with the over-riding obligation to obedience. In short, as well as having located a magistracy empowered to resist an ungodly prince, Knox had also found a way of sanctioning resistance without negating the principle - indeed, divine ordinance - of obedience to the royal office and its potentially godly occupants.

The preacher's discovery of these two ideological devices - the concept of an inferior magistracy and the distinction between the office and the person of a prince - was clearly crucial to the radicalization of his political thought. It should be stressed, however, that they were by no means original to him. In fact, not only did both ideas have a distinguished medieval pedigree, but both were also employed by Protestants - including Luther himself - in the late 1520's and 1530's.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the same ideas are also to be found in the works of John Ponet and Christopher Goodman, two fellow Marian exiles who shared Knox's preoccupation with the question of

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1. Knox defended the idea in a debate in the General Assembly of 1564 on the grounds that: '... the ordinance of God, and the power giffen unto man, is one thing, and the persone clad with the power or with the authoritie, is ane uther; for Godis ordinance is the conservatioun of mankynd, the punischment of vyce, the mentenyng of vertew, quhilk is in it self holie, just, constant, stable, and perpetuall. But men clad with the authoritie, ar commounly prophane and unjust; yea, thai ar mutabill and transitorie, and subject to corruptioun ...' (see *ibid.*, ii, 435-8).

2. On the general background and lineage of these ideas, see Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, ii, Ch.7; and R. R. Benert, 'Inferior Magistrates in Sixteenth Century Political and Legal Thought', Unpubl. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1967.

resistance.<sup>1</sup> It is possible, indeed, that these three were all indebted to a common source, the most likely candidate being the Magdeburg Bekenntnis of 1550. Drawn up by the Lutheran pastors of Magdeburg in an attempt to vindicate their city's continued defiance of imperial authority, the Bekenntnis summed up many of the ideas on resistance promulgated by the first generation of Protestant reformers. Consequently, it constituted a veritable treasure-trove for militant Calvinists whose own leaders were unable or unwilling to provide ideological backing for their revolutionary schemes. Although there is no direct proof that Knox was aware of its existence in 1558, the Bekenntnis certainly contained the key elements of the theory of resistance which the preacher elaborated in the Appellation.<sup>2</sup> Identifying Knox's precise sources, however, is perhaps less important here than establishing the fact that he was working within a Protestant tradition which viewed resistance, not as a constitutional right to be exercised at its possessor's discretion, but as a religious duty to be performed in strict accordance with the law of God. Thus, the main contention of the Appellation was not that inferior magistrates had a right to defend the true religion against an ungodly prince, but that

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1. See Ponet, A Short Treatise of Politic Power (1556), reprinted in W. S. Hudson, John Ponet (1516?-1556), Advocate of Limited Monarchy (Chicago, 1942); and Goodman, How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyd (1558), reprinted with a biographical note by C. H. McIlwain (New York, 1931).
  2. Knox was certainly aware of 'the Apologie of Magdeburgh' by 1564 when he cited it in the debate on resistance in the General Assembly of that year (see Knox, Works, ii, 453). For a fuller discussion of these points, however, which traces the influence of the Bekenntnis on Ponet, Goodman and Knox, see Esther Hildebrandt, 'The Magdeburg Bekenntnis as a Possible Link between German and English Resistance Theory in the Sixteenth Century', Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, LXXI (1980), 227-53.



if they failed so to do they would most assuredly 'provoke the wrath of God against themselves and against the realme in which they abuse the auctoritie, which they have receaved of God, to mentaine vertue and to repress vice'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, here as elsewhere, Knox had no hesitation in couching his thought in the language of imperatives with which we are already so familiar. In his view, a conscientious nobility simply had no choice but to resist the tyrannical rule of an idolatrous sovereign.

It was not simply the nobility, however, who were bound on pain of damnation to fulfil the imperatives of the divine will. In the Letter to the Commonalty, issued in conjunction with the Appellation, Knox went on to insist that the people too were obliged to resist an idolatrous sovereign. Arguing quite logically from the equality of all men before God, the preacher concluded that God 'requireth no lesse of the subjectes then of the rulers' and that He punishes not only 'the chefe offenders, but with them doth he damne the consenters to iniquitie : and all are judged to consent, that, knowing impietie committed, give no testimonie that the same displeaseth them'.<sup>2</sup> All the faithful, irrespective of 'the love of frendes, the fear of your Princes, and the wisdom of the world' were bound to resist and suppress idolatry.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere in the Letter to the Commonalty, however, did Knox explicitly urge the people to execute or even depose an idolatrous sovereign. He advised them to withhold their tithes and to

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1. Knox, Works, iv, 497.

2. Ibid., iv, 535.

3. Ibid., iv, 534.

establish and defend 'true preachers',<sup>1</sup> but he stopped short of ascribing to them the duty to commit tyrannicide. Admittedly, his thought is not unambiguous on this point, but a close reading of both the Appellation and the Letter to the Commonalty suggests that Knox subscribed to a basically Lutheran concept of vocation which effectively precluded a populist theory of revolution. Thus, in the Appellation, he declared:

That the the punishment of such crimes, as are idolatrie, blasphemie, and others ... dothe not appertaine to kinges and chefe rulers only, but also to the whole bodie of that people, and to every membre of the same, according to the vocation of everie man, and according to that possibilitie and occasion which God doth minister to<sup>2</sup> revenge the injurie done against his glorie ...

It seems unlikely that Knox considered it 'the vocation of every man' to commit tyrannicide. The most the evidence would seem fully capable of sustaining is that he urged the people to remain undefiled by idolatry, to suppress it where the 'possibility and occasion' arose, and to support with enthusiasm the legitimate efforts of an inferior magistracy to supplant an ungodly ruler. It was, therefore, primarily to the nobility that Knox looked for the implementation of what as he saw as the divine will. After all, as he reflected in the Appellation, 'seing that God only hath placed you in his chaire, hath appointed you to be his lieutenantes, and by his owne seall hath marked you to be Magistrates ... how horrible ingratitude were it then, that you should

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1. Ibid., iv, 533-4.

2. Ibid., iv, 501 (italics added); for an analysis of Knox's use of the idea of vocation and its precedents in Lutheran thought, see Benert, 'Inferior Magistrates', 122-4.

be founde unfaithful to hym that thus hath honored you'.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Appellation clearly embodies a highly sophisticated theory of resistance, however, one must beware of construing it as an unequivocal call to the Scottish nobility to depose their Catholic sovereign. In fact, despite its general tenor, it contains no such explicit incitement to deposition or even armed rebellion as far as Scotland was concerned. On the contrary, it was only in England that Knox believed that such actions could be justified. What lay behind this at first sight rather curious distinction was the simple fact that, in Knox's eyes, whereas England was a covenanted nation, Scotland was not. 'I fear not to affirm', argued the preacher, 'that the Gentiles (I mean everie citie, realme, province, or nation amongst the Gentiles, embrasing Christ Jesus and his true religion) be bound to the same leage and covenant that God made with his people Israel'.<sup>2</sup> Now, in the case of England where, under the godly rule of Edward VI, the magistrates and people had 'solemnely avowed and promised to defend' God's truth, Knox was in no doubt that the terms of such a covenant still applied. Consequently, he had no compunction in arguing not only that it was 'lawful to punish to the death such as labour to subvert the true Religion' - including 'Marie, that Jesabel, whome they call their Queen' - but also that the 'Magistrates and people are bound so to do, onles they wil provoke the wrath of God against themselves'.<sup>3</sup> The Scots, however, had never officially embraced the 'true

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1. Knox, Works, iv, 481.

2. Ibid., iv, 505.

3. Ibid., iv, 506-7.



religion' and could not, therefore, be classed as a covenanted community in the same sense as the people of England. Consequently, Knox's instructions to the Protestant nobility of the northern kingdom fell some way short of a forthright demand for the execution of their sovereign or even of her representative, the Regent Mary of Guise. Indeed, the preacher confined himself to the comparatively lame injunction that 'if ye know that in your handes God hath put the sworde ..., then can ye not denie, but that the punishment of obstinate and malepert idolatouris (such as all your Bishoppes be) doth appertaine to your office'.<sup>1</sup> When he wrote the Appellation, however, Knox apparently did not know that on 3 December 1557 several leading Scottish Protestants had put their names to a 'Common Band' or covenant in which they had confessed that they 'aught, according to our bonden deuitie, to stryve in our Maisteris caus, evin unto the death' and had sworn 'befoir the Majestie of God ... that we (be his grace) shall with all diligence continually apply our hole power, substance, and our verray lyves, to manteane, sett fordward, and establish the most blessed word of God and his Congregatioun'.<sup>2</sup> With the signing of the First Band, the Lords of the Congregation had formally entered into a covenant with God which bound them to fulfil the divine will irrespective of the wishes of the temporal power. Protestantism had, in effect, emerged as a major political force in Scotland and, within eighteen months, the Congregation were to launch a rebellion squarely based on the covenanting ideology embodied in Knox's Appellation.

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1. Ibid., iv, 508-8.

2. Ibid., i, 273-4.

## Chapter Nine

Covenant and Commonweal

The decade between 1557 and 1567, between the signing of the First Band and the deposition of Mary Stewart, was one of the most momentous as well as the most complex periods in early modern Scottish history. During these years, there occurred not only a confessional revolution which saw Protestantism replace Catholicism as the official religion of the Scots, but also a series of rebellions and attempted coups d'etat which challenged many of the traditional norms of Scottish political life. The latter were not, of course, wholly unconnected with the former : indeed, throughout these years of crisis, religion and politics remained so closely interwoven that to treat one without reference to the other is to risk the gross misrepresentation of both. Fortunately, however, as regards the present study, it is unnecessary to broach such perennial, but ultimately insoluble problems as whether those who supported the cause of reform were motivated primarily by spiritual zeal or worldly ambition. Rather, we are concerned here only with examining how the political ideas and assumptions analysed in previous chapters affected the behaviour of both those who participated and those who chose not to participate in the critical events unfolding in their midst. In this respect, our task is greatly facilitated by the fact that, as Gordon Donaldson has pointed out, the conflict precipitated by the Congregation's rising against Mary of Guise in 1559 was 'fought less by weapons than by propaganda' and that the 'outstanding fact is the novel appeal of both sides to a public opinion'.<sup>1</sup> In

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1. Gordon Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII (rev. edtn., Edinburgh, 1971), 100, 102.

fact, this is true not just of 1559, but of the entire period up to and including the deposition of Mary Stewart in 1567. To a degree unprecedented in Scottish history, these years witnessed the repeated efforts of politicians, preachers and polemicists publicly to justify their own and their parties' actions and at the same time to persuade the uncommitted actively to support their various causes. As a result there exists a substantial body of material which clearly reveals the ideological issues of the period and the extent to which political debate was conducted in and constrained by those modes of discourse - the languages of the covenant and of the commonweal - whose conventions and implications we have already subjected to detailed scrutiny. Not unexpectedly, the issue of paramount importance throughout the decade was whether or not it was lawful to resist an established authority by force and at one level what follows in this chapter is simply an analysis of how first the Congregation and then the Confederate Lords sought to legitimate their rebellions of 1559 and 1567 respectively. At the same time, however, an attempt is made to move beyond a bare description of the rebels' professed aims and intentions to a consideration of the way in which their propaganda came deliberately to be couched in the commonweal language habitually employed by those they sought to influence and of how this in turn inevitably imposed constraints upon the public behaviour of the rebels themselves.<sup>1</sup> In this

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1. The approach adopted in this chapter owes a considerable debt to Quentin Skinner, 'The Principles and Practice of Opposition : The Case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole', in Historical Perspectives : Studies in English Thought and Society in Honour of J. H. Plumb, ed. Neil McKendrick (London, 1974), 93-128. On the same theme, see also the same author's 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action', Political Theory, II (1974), 277-303, esp. 289ff.



way, it is hoped to show that the political beliefs and expectations of the Scottish community at large not only profoundly affected the conduct of those directly involved in the conflicts of the period, but thereby also exerted considerable influence over the course and resolution of the Reformation crisis as a whole.

# I

An analysis of the Congregation's propaganda may most conveniently begin with a letter they wrote from Perth on 22 May 1559 and addressed to the regent, Mary of Guise. The letter is of importance not simply because it marks the Congregation's last formal defiance of the regent before the outbreak of hostilities between them, but also because it gives a clear idea of the language in which they chose to legitimate their actions. As one might expect, that language was essentially religious in character. Stung by the regent's telling jibe that they 'intended not religioun but the subversioun of authoritie',<sup>1</sup> the Congregation retorted that their 'revolt from our accustomed obedience' was prompted solely by reasons of faith and that they would at once revert to that obedience 'provided that our consciences may lyve in that peace and libertie whiche Christ Jesus hath purchassed till us by his blood'. They sought only, they declared, to have God's Word 'trewlie preached' and His Holy Sacraments 'ryghtlie ministrat', in which regard they were firmly resolved 'never to be subject to mortall man'. Consequently, the Congregation asserted that, if the regent persisted in her persecution of the faithful:

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1. David Calderwood, The History of the Kirk of Scotland, ed. T. Thomson (Wodrow Society, 1842-49), 1, 433.

we will be compelled to tak the sweard of just defence aganis all that shall persew us for the mater of religioun, and for our conscience saik; whiche awght not, nor may nott be subject to mortale creatures, farder than be God's worde man be able to prove that he hath power to command us.

The Congregation insisted, in other words, that theirs was simply a revolt of conscience undertaken in defence of a religion which, prescribed by God and revealed in Scripture, was not amenable to the dictates of man. Signing themselves 'Your Grace's obedient subjectis in all thingis not repugnant to God', they defied the merely human authority of the regent in the name of the higher and unchallengeable authority of the divine will. It was a stance of which their spiritual mentor, John Knox, would have wholeheartedly approved. Indeed, in declaring that they would rather expose their bodies to a 'thowsand deathis' than hazard eternal damnation 'by denying Christ Jesus and his manifest veritie', the Congregation spoke in an authentically Knoxian voice.<sup>1</sup>

This, however, should come as no surprise, for Knox, returning from exile early in May 1559, was with the Congregation in Perth as they gathered both their military and their ideological resources in preparation for the regent's expected onslaught. Whether or not the preacher actually drafted the letter is impossible to determine, but its consonance with the main thrust of Knox's thought as outlined in the previous chapter is clearly apparent. In effect, the Congregation were simply following Knox's prescription that they had in conscience no choice but to obey the binding imperatives of the divine will even

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1. For the full text of the letter, see The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing (Wodrow Society, 1846-64), i, 326-327.

at the expense of defying the authority of the temporal power. Moreover, although there is no explicit mention of a covenant in their letter, the idea is nonetheless latent in their commitment, on pain of damnation, to the laws of God rather than of men. The concept is latent, in fact, throughout the early writings of the Congregation. The First Band, for example, was not simply a social or political bond of the type familiar enough to sixteenth century Scots, but was also, and pre-eminently, a 'faithfull promesse befoir God' which, by vesting the traditional idea of banding with new religious significance, effectively transformed it into a written expression of the 'league and covenant' envisaged by Knox.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, the apocalyptic sanctions which lent Knox's covenant its cutting-edge are not explicitly referred to in the First Band. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Band is couched in the same covenanting language - the language of conscience, duty and necessity - which characterizes the preacher's later writings and which, at least initially, was to characterize also the public pronouncements of his allies in Scotland.

The Congregation's use of the language of the covenant can, in fact, be readily illustrated from the many public documents they issued in the course of 1558 and 1559. For example, in 'The First Oratioun and Petitioun of the Protestantes of Scotland', presented to the regent in November 1558, they claimed in characteristic terms that they were 'of verray conscience and by the feare of our God, compelled to crave'

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1. For the full text of the First Band, see *ibid.*, i, 273-274; for an example of bonding in the political sphere, see Beaton's 'Secret Band' of July 1543 analysed above, pp.196-197; for Knox's view of the covenant, see above, pp.257ff.



remedy for the unjust tyranny of the ecclesiastical estate.<sup>1</sup> In similar vein, the imperatives stemming from their covenant with God are equally in evidence when, on 6 May 1559, in 'greif and troubill' of their minds, the Congregation felt 'constrainit' to write to the regent, not only in the hope of relief, but also, 'according to our dewtye, to confess our Lord and God in the presens of princes, and nocht to be eschamit'. In this same letter, moreover, the Congregation vowed in terms worthy of Knox himself that, if the regent commanded anything against the ordinance of God, they would 'of necessitie' disobey her, 'for God in us aucht to hefe the first place'.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, their defiant letter of 22 May 1559 marked no sudden change in the language in which the Congregation chose to couch their protests and appeals to the regent. Although on at least one occasion they did evince a concern for the reform of 'the temporall government',<sup>3</sup> from the outset their propaganda emphasized rather that they opposed the regent on grounds of conscience and that their aims were fundamentally religious in character. If anything, this claim was made still more

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1. Knox, Works, i, 302. Both the element of compulsion and the religious sanction which lay behind it are made still clearer in a letter to parliament written at the end of November in which the Congregation averred that, 'onless we should declair our selfis altogether unmyndfull of our awin salvatioun, we are compelled, of verray conscience, to seak how that we and our brethrein may be delivered from the thraldome of Sathan' (ibid., i, 310). See also the 'Protestatioun' laid before parliament in December (ibid., i, 312-314).
  2. This letter was probably written by Erskine of Dun and is printed as an appendix to the Dun papers in Miscellany of the Spalding Club (Spalding Club, 1841-52), iv, 88-92.
  3. See the 'Oratioun' of November 1558 (Knox, Works, i, 303). In the following month, however, in the 'Protestatioun', the Congregation insisted 'that these our requeastis, proceeding from conscience, do tend to none other end, but to the Reformatioun of abuses in Religioun onlie' (ibid., i, 314).

insistently after the outbreak of hostilities. When in July 1559, for example, the regent proclaimed yet again that they were bent simply on usurping her authority, the Congregation replied quite unequivocally that their 'mynd and purpose was and is to promote and sett furth the glorie of God', while 'in all civile and politick matteris, we ar and shalbe als obedient as ony uther your Gracis subjectis within the realme'.<sup>1</sup> It was, moreover, this same stance which Lord James Stewart (the future Regent Moray) adopted when, after formally joining the Congregation, he was accused of fomenting sedition by his half-sister Mary, the absent queen of Scots, and her husband, Francis II of France. In a letter of August 1559, Lord James declared that he had acted only 'for the advancement of Godis glorie ... without ony maner derogatioun to your Majesteis dew obedience' and that, as the Congregation's proceedings were 'groundit upon the commandiment of the eternal God, we dar nocht leif the samyn unaccompleischeit'. He wished only, he added, that their majesties 'did knaw the same, and treuth thairof, as it is perswaidit to our conscience' and that God would illuminate their hearts and show them their duty towards their 'pure subjectis, Godis chosin pepill'.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps not insignificantly, on 31 May 1559 Lord James had himself put his name to the Second Band drawn up by the Congregation and had thereby 'confederat, and become bundin and obleast in the presence of God' to join with his fellow signatories 'in doing all thingis required of God in his Scripture, that may be to his glorie'.<sup>3</sup> Evidently enough, Lord James was as aware as even Knox could have wished of the obligations and imperatives stemming from a covenant with God.

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1. Ibid., i, 365-366.

2. Ibid., i, 387.

3. Ibid., i, 344-345.



Incisive and compelling as their covenanting ideology undoubtedly was, however, it is clear from the above quotations that the Congregation were extremely reluctant to construe their opposition to Mary of Guise as an unqualified act of political resistance. Not only, for example, did they insist on the purely religious objectives of their movement, but they frequently protested their allegiance to the temporal power in all things not repugnant to God. Such a stance provides eloquent testimony to the authority of Romans 13 and to the general reluctance (shared by Knox) to contravene its terms. In this respect, moreover, Mary of Guise may herself have contributed to the rebels' cautious restraint, for (as will become clear) she spoke time and again in her propaganda in terms reminiscent of the Pauline injunction that the powers are ordained by God and that whoever resists them resists the ordinance of God and will suffer damnation. Yet, as we have seen, Knox had already discovered how St. Paul's apparently incontrovertible injunction to obey might nevertheless be made compatible with a fully-fledged theory of resistance. It is not surprising, therefore, that before long the two ideological devices which had permitted the radicalization of Knox's thought were to appear also in the propaganda of the Congregation.

The first such device - the idea of an inferior magistrate ordained, like a prince, by God - had in fact been well known to the Congregation for some time before they rose in rebellion in May 1559. In October 1557, for example, several months prior even to the publication of the Appellation, Knox had written to his noble allies in Scotland and assured them that they received 'honour, tribute and homage at Goddis commandment, not be reasson of your birth and progenye, ... but by ressoun of your office and dewtie'. The nobility



were, in other words, officers ordained by God whose duties were, as Knox went on to explain, not only 'to vindicat and deliver your subjectes and brethrein from all violence and oppressioun, to the uttermost of your power', but even 'to hasard your awin lyves (be it against Kingis or Empriouris,) for thare deliverance'.<sup>1</sup> It may have been in response to this letter that, some six weeks later, the Lords of the Congregation drew up and signed the First Band. Certainly, little more than a year later, it was surely with just such an explicit pluralization of the Pauline 'powers' in mind that they described themselves in the 'First Oratioun and Petitioun' as 'a parte of that power which God hath establied in this realme' and acknowledged that it was their 'bound dewities befoir God' to protect their brethren from bloody persecution.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the idea that the nobility were magistrates ordained by God is equally apparent in the letter which the Congregation addressed to all Scots of noble rank at the end of May 1559. For in an unmistakeable echo of Knox's own phraseology, the nobility are there described as those 'whose dewetie is to defend innocentis, and to brydle the fury and raige of wicked men, wer it of Princes or Empriouris'.<sup>3</sup>

Indubitably, as a means of underwriting the authority of the nobility, the idea of an inferior magistracy was immensely powerful. As a means of sanctioning resistance, however, it did not of itself solve all the problems posed by Romans 13. In fact, as we saw in the previous chapter, it seemed rather to exacerbate them by creating a

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1. Ibid., i, 272.

2. Ibid., i, 302.

3. Ibid., i, 330.

plurality of powers to each and all of whom obedience was theoretically due regardless of any disputes which might arise among them. It was in order to counter this potential absurdity that, in his Appellation, Knox had made use of a second ideological device - the distinction between the power as ordained by God and the person who happened to wield that power - and had argued that, while the former was by definition perfect and unchallengeable, the latter was subject to worldly corruption and (if need be) might not only be disobeyed, but actually resisted by force.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not Knox was directly responsible for its drafting, this crucial distinction is commented upon at some length in the same letter of May 1559 in which the Congregation cast the Scottish nobility in the role of inferior magistrates of the realm. Admitting that any authority established by God must be 'good and perfyite' and was 'to be obeyed of all men, yea, under the pane of demnation', the Congregation went on to point out that there was nevertheless 'a great difference betuix the authoritie quhiche is goddis ordinance, and the personis of those whiche ar placit in authoritie'. While the 'authoritie and Goddis ordinance' could (by definition) 'never do wrang', 'the corrupt person placed in this authoritie' could and often did prove wicked and unjust. At this stage in the propaganda war, however, the Congregation were still reluctant to infer from this that the person of the prince might therefore be deposed without impugning the sanctity of the office he held. Instead, they contented themselves simply with warning those who hid behind the 'name and cloke of the Authoritie' that, if they continued to 'obey the iniust commandimentis of wicked rewlaris, ye sall suffer Goddis

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1. See above, pp.283-285.



vengeance and just punishment with thame'.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear from the above that, by the end of May 1559, the Congregation were ideologically equipped to circumvent Romans 13 and thus ultimately to legitimate not only resistance, but even deposition.

In fact, however, it was not long before the Congregation did spell out for all to see the revolutionary implications of the ideology now at their disposal. On 28 August 1559, the regent issued a proclamation in which, echoing the terms of Romans 13, she upbraided the insurgents for not showing 'debtful obedience' towards her and accused the preachers of encouraging disobedience to the 'heiar powers' in their slanderous and irreverent sermons.<sup>2</sup> The Congregation's response to this provides ample evidence that, whoever was the ideologue behind the rebel cause, whether it was Knox himself or some other person from among their ranks, he was well aware of where the arguments deployed in May might ultimately lead.<sup>3</sup> He began conventionally enough, for example, by claiming that the preachers had always maintained 'the auctoratie of Princeis and Magistratis to be of God' and that they had always declared that 'they aucht to be honourit, feirit, obeyit, even for conscience saik; providit that they command nor requyre nathing expreslie repugning to Goddis commandiment and plane will, reveillit in his holy word'. He then went on, however, to argue that, if wicked princes commanded wicked things, then those who 'may and do brydill'

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1. Knox, Works, i, 331-332.

2. Ibid., i, 397-399.

3. For what follows, see *ibid.*, i, 410-411. One obviously suspects Knox's influence, but as suggested elsewhere (above, pp.285-286) the ideas discussed here were of European currency and it is quite conceivable that Scots other than Knox were aware of them.



them 'can not be accusit as resistaris of the auctoratie, quhilk is Godis gud ordinance'. In other words, as God's ordinance was of necessity good, those who resisted an evil prince resisted, not the authority ordained by God, but only a corrupt person clad in that authority. As for the inferior magistrates enjoined by the divine will to 'brydill the fury and raige of Princeis', we are told that 'it appertenis to the Nobilitie, sworne and borne Counsallouris of the same, and allsua to the Barronis and Pepill, quhais voteis and consent ar to be requyreit in all gret and wechty materis of the communwelth'. Indeed, if these inferior magistrates were not to take action against a wicked prince, they would be considered as criminal as the prince himself and subject to the same vengeance of God. Both Mary of Guise and Mary Stewart might well have been concerned, for armed with this radical ideology, the Congregation were not simply justified, but actually obliged by the imperative will of God to 'bridle' their rulers' 'rage and fury'.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that on 21 October 1559 the Congregation did formally deprive Mary of Guise of her authority. What is perhaps slightly more surprising, however, is that the Act of Suspension signed by 'The Nobility and Commouns of the Protestants of the Church of Scotland' contains only the faintest traces of the convenanting theory of resistance outlined above.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, there is a passing reference to the 'debtful obedience' which subjects owe to sovereigns who proceed 'by Godis ordinance', and also a cursory aside to the effect that 'the Nobilitie, Barones, and Provest of Burrowes'

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1. For the full text of the Act from which the following quotes are drawn, see Knox, Works, i, 444-449.

are 'not onlie borne, but alswa sworne protectouris and defendaris' of the realm. Yet it is manifest from the Act as a whole that the Congregation were no longer acting solely in response to the imperatives of the divine will and no longer, indeed, concerned solely with matters of conscience. Religion, in fact, is mentioned hardly at all in the Act, while self-righteous appeals to the will of God are notable only by their absence. Gone entirely, in short, is the covenanting language - the language of conscience, duty and necessity - in which the Congregation had previously articulated their aims and aspirations. Rather, the Act of Suspension is couched from start to finish in that same language of the commonweal with which we are already so familiar. The nobility, barons and burghs are convened, the Act begins, 'to advise upoun the affairis of the commoun-weall, and to ayde, supporte, and succour the samyn, perceaving and lamenting the interprysed destruction of thair said commoun-weall, and over-throw of the libertie of thair native cuntree'. The Act then goes on to accuse the regent of proceeding against her subjects without 'ony process or ordour of law'; of garrisoning the town of Perth and 'oppressing the liberties of the Quenis trew lieges'; of altering 'the auld law and consuetude of our realme'; of bringing in 'strangearis' (i.e., Frenchmen) with intent 'to suppress the commoun-weal, and libertie of our native cuntree'; and, finally, of doing all this without consultation with those who 'be borne counsallouris to the same, be the ancient lawis of the realme'. In short, the Congregation now claimed to be acting, not as servants of God, but as 'favoraris' of the 'commoun-weal', and they suspended the regent, not as an offence before God, but as an 'enemye to our commoun-weal'.



To say the least, this represents a major change of emphasis in the Congregation's propaganda which cries out for analysis and explanation. It is, however, only fair to admit that the change was neither as abrupt nor as unheralded as the foregoing account suggests. As will become clear in a moment, commonweal rhetoric had in fact featured prominently in the public discourse of the Congregation for some weeks before October 1559. Indeed, it is the very fact that during this period they appealed to both the covenant and the commonweal to legitimate their actions that lends the Congregation's public pronouncements of 1559 such interest. For it immediately raises the question of why, given that there were two languages available to them, they deliberately chose to abandon one mode of discourse in favour of the other. Or, put more simply, why did they choose, when it came to the suspension of the regent, to describe themselves as defenders of the commonweal of Scotland rather than as signatories of a covenant with God? At the same time, moreover, it raises the further question of what consequences followed from the particular choice which the Congregation made. Or, put another way, did legitimating their actions in terms of the commonweal rather than the covenant have any material effect on their subsequent behaviour and thereby on the subsequent course of events? The remainder of this chapter is devoted to answering both of these questions. It is as well to begin, however, with an examination of the pressures to which the Congregation were subject and which account in part for the dramatic change which the language of their propaganda underwent.



## II

Broadly speaking, there were two sets of influences operating on the Congregation and affecting the way in which they couched their propaganda. The first of these was related to circumstances outwith Scotland and the second to internal events. Of the external influences we need at this stage say very little as we will return to them later and view them in a rather different perspective. It is enough at this point simply to remember how dependent the Congregation were upon the resources and aid which England could supply : without them, indeed, the rebels would in the end almost certainly have been crushed by the superior forces which the regent was able to muster. Equally, however, no reminder is needed of the fear and suspicion with which Elizabeth I regarded John Knox. His First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, published in 1558 on the eve of the English queen's unforeseen accession, was probably the least fortunately timed of all the preacher's blasts upon his favourite instrument and, in the circumstances, it is hardly a coincidence that the lack of natural or scriptural authority for female rule was not an argument which commended itself to the Congregation in their attempts to justify resistance to Mary of Guise. Elizabeth, however, was not just out of sympathy (to put it mildly) with the First Blast, she was also, on grounds of principle as well as of policy, out of sympathy with any show of resistance to constituted authority. Consequently, with little time for either religious fanatics or rebellious aristocrats (and doubtless still less if they hailed from Scotland), it was only with extreme reluctance that Elizabeth allowed William Cecil to shuffle her into open intervention

on the Congregation's behalf.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, it was imperative that the Scottish rebels did not alienate the English queen by justifying their revolt in terms with which Elizabeth's delicate digestion could not cope. The covenant, needless to say, was a morsel which she found as dangerous as it was distasteful - a morsel, moreover, made doubly indigestible when it rendered resistance to constituted authority an imperative command of God. On these grounds alone, therefore, the Congregation would have had to think twice about the language in which they legitimated their actions. There were, however, other, purely Scottish grounds for doubting the advisability of confining themselves to an exclusively religious justification of their revolt and it is on these that we ought first to concentrate.

Foremost among such native constraints must be ranked the plain fact that support for Protestantism within Scotland was still insufficient to ensure the success of the Congregation's enterprise. Progress had certainly been made since Knox's fleeting mission of 1555-6 and, as the First Band indicates, Scottish Protestants were now a much more cohesive and self-conscious group than had previously been the case. To a considerable degree, however, the Congregation's emergence as a political force was less a function of popular support for their cause than a result of the conciliatory approach which circumstances had obliged the regent to adopt towards the reforming movement's politically influential leadership.<sup>2</sup> Since coming to power in 1554, Mary of

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1. The process is chronicled in Conyers Read, Mr. Secretary Cecil and Queen Elizabeth (New York, 1955), Ch. 7.
  2. For the background to this and what follows, see Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII, 88-92, and Jenny Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community : Scotland 1470-1625 (London, 1981), 109-116.



Guise had pursued a policy aimed at maintaining the Franco-Scottish alliance through the marriage of her daughter, Mary Stewart, to Francis, son and heir of King Henry II of France. As a price for their acquiescence in the marriage, the Protestant nobility had exacted from the regent a fair degree of toleration for those who preached and professed the reformed faith and had thereby effectively nullified any attempt to reform the church from within. Although the long-awaited marriage did finally take place in April 1558, the situation was not in fact fully resolved until November when the Scottish parliament officially bestowed the crown matrimonial upon Mary Stewart's French spouse. Up until then, the Protestant nobility remained hopeful of forcing further concessions from the regent and, to Knox's extreme annoyance, were reluctant to have him return to Scotland while such delicate negotiations were in progress. Consequently, for the best part of a year, the preacher's thunderous letters to his noble allies in Scotland were left unanswered and he returned to Geneva to brood darkly on what he saw as the iniquities of the Congregation's worldly conduct and to vent his ire in the prophetic fury of the First Blast and the Appellation.<sup>1</sup> In November 1558, however, the situation was suddenly transformed, not so much by the regent's success in obtaining the crown matrimonial for her son-in-law as by the death of Mary Tudor and the accession of Elizabeth to the English throne. It was these events - and particularly the latter - which precipitated the Reformation crisis in Scotland : for just as Mary of Guise had now

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1. For Knox's letters, see Works, iv, 276-286, 248-253. When precisely the preacher was finally invited to return is uncertain, but in the History he claimed to have received his third and last invitation from the Lords of the Congregation in November 1558 (*ibid.*, i, 274).



no incentive to indulge Scottish Protestants even as a means of embarrassing a Catholic regime in England, so the prospect loomed of the Congregation seeking support from an English administration worried both by Mary Stewart's claim to Elizabeth's crown and by the dangers inherent in a Franco-Scottish entente. Indeed, in purely domestic terms, as the positions of the interested parties were made known in the months following November, it became clear that the Congregation had little option - regardless of the prospect of English support - but to defy an increasingly bellicose regent. With the outbreak of hostilities in May 1559, however, it became equally clear that too few of their countrymen were responding to the covenanting rhetoric in which they couched their propaganda.

While it may well be the case, as H. G. Koenigsberger has argued, that only religious ideology could have bound together the disparate - but nonetheless highly committed - elements of a sixteenth century revolutionary party, one may well doubt whether the stark imperatives of the Congregation's covenanting language held much appeal for those uncommitted Scottish souls whose faith - even if it were a Protestant faith - burned at somewhat less than the white heat of a John Knox.<sup>1</sup> We may reasonably assume that the Scottish governing class, the nobles

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1. See H. G. Koenigsberger, 'The Organization of Revolutionary Parties in France and the Netherlands during the Sixteenth Century', in his Estates and Revolutions: Essays in Early Modern European History (Ithaca and London, 1971), 224-252. In this influential article, Koenigsberger argued (pp.225-226) that: 'Religious belief alone, no matter whether it was held with fanatic conviction or for political expediency, could bring together the divergent interests of nobles, burghers, and peasants ...' This was probably as true of the Scottish Congregation as it was of Protestant parties in France and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the success of religious ideology in binding together those already committed (for whatever reason) to revolutionary action was hardly matched by its success in persuading the uncommitted of either the necessity or the legitimacy of that action.

and lairds whose support the Congregation so desperately needed, was no less religious than that of any other western European country. By the same token, however, neither was it any more likely to support a rebellion whose legitimacy was claimed to rest on the imperatives of the divine will and whose stated objectives were nothing more (or nothing less) than to have God's Word 'truly preached' and His Holy Sacraments 'rightly ministered'. Perhaps contrary to received opinion, the Scots were not genetically prone to rebellion and the ingrained habit of obedience, allied in equal doses with fear and apathy, were characteristics of sixteenth century political culture which - as their frequent protestations of allegiance testify - the Congregation found it extremely hard to counter.<sup>1</sup> As Lord James and the earl of Argyll were forced privately to admit, it was far from easy 'to persuade a multitude to the revolt of an Authoritie established',<sup>2</sup> and such were the consequences of failure - imprisonment, forfeiture, exile and ultimately execution - that even those most sympathetic to the Congregation's aims would naturally hesitate before committing themselves to such a risky and uncertain course of action. The Congregation, however, already in the field and already branded as a seditious rabble by an astute regent, could not afford to wait upon the hesitant. For them the die was cast and, if they were to succeed in their enterprise, they needed converts quickly or even such support as they had would melt away in the face of the regent's implacable hostility. Consequently,

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1. The reluctance rather than the readiness of the Scots to rebel is a point which emerges with some clarity from the writings of Jenny Wormald. For details of these, see above, p.131, note 1.
  2. Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots 1547-1603, ed. J. Bain and others (Edinburgh, 1898), 1, no.516.



matters of faith alone being insufficient to move the uncommitted to rebel against the authority, the Congregation had to provide them with greater incentives and more compelling grounds for joining their revolt.

That the Congregation were aware both of their weakness and of a possible means of compensating for it is intimated in the same letter, written late in May 1559, in which they called on the nobility to perform their role as inferior magistrates of the realm. For almost as a postscript, they requested those who opposed them to show moderation, if not 'for Godis cause', then for 'the preservatioun of our common cuntree, whiche we cannot sonnar betray in the handis of strangeris than that one of us distroy and murther ane uther'.<sup>1</sup> This oblique reference to Scotland's plight as a province of France, ruled by a French regent and increasingly dominated by French officials, was to provide the Congregation with precisely the leverage they required to broaden the basis of their appeal. Events, moreover, played into their hands, for on the 10 July 1559 Henry II of France was accidentally killed at a tournament and Mary Stewart, the wife of the new King Francis II, became queen of France as well as of Scots. This unlooked for eventuality - or, as Knox would have it, this 'wonderouse wark of God'<sup>2</sup> - was important not only because it lessened the chances of the Scottish queen ever returning to her native realm, but also because it correspondingly increased the likelihood of Scotland becoming nothing more than an outlying and insignificant province of the French kingdom.

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1. Knox, Works, i, 334.

2. Ibid., i, 371.



Ironically enough, the Scots had entertained just such forebodings ever since 1548 when, as we have seen, to save themselves from English domination, they had conveyed their queen to France and to an eventual French marriage. Their fears had increased when a foreigner, Mary of Guise, obtained the regency and were by no means allayed by the mysterious goings-on which surrounded her daughter's marriage to the dauphin in 1558. Nor were their misgivings at all misplaced, for not only did the bestowal of the crown matrimonial give regal powers over Scotland to a future king of France, but by a secret treaty signed by Mary Stewart three weeks before her marriage Scottish sovereignty was virtually transferred to the French royal house.<sup>1</sup> It appeared, indeed, as if the worst fears of the patriots of the 1540's were now on the point of fulfilment : the freedom of the realm, for so long threatened by English aggression, was about to fall victim to French ambition. In effect, Mary of Guise had achieved by stealth what Henry VIII and Protector Somerset had failed to impose by force. Nor, in fact, was this the only aspect of the regent's policy which the Congregation might exploit to their advantage. At the same time, her valiant attempts to overhaul the Scottish administration - in particular, her efforts to raise taxation and her intrusion of 'strangers' (Frenchmen) into key governmental posts - had done nothing to reconcile the Scottish aristocracy to the prospect of rule from France.<sup>2</sup> Here, indeed, was a ripening harvest of political disaffection which the Congregation might

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1. For details of this secret agreement, see A Source Book of Scottish History, ed. W. C. Dickinson, G. Donaldson and I. A. Milne (London and Edinburgh, 1952-54), ii, 148-149.

2. For details of the regent's domestic policy and the Scots' reaction to it, see Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII, 85-88. See also Rosalind K. Marshall, Mary of Guise (London, 1977), Ch. 9.

reap simply by extending the scope of their appeal to include patriotism as well as Protestantism. For the Scottish ruling class, unwilling to revolt 'of an authority established' on the pretext of religion alone, might well respond to an opposition in the field if it posed also as the last bulwark of Scotland's - and, of course, their own - freedom and liberties.

As was noted above, the Congregation were not unaware of the potential benefits of such a stance and they seem in fact to have shared the belief of the Englishman Sir Henry Percy that many Scots would enlist in their ranks simply 'to keip owt the Frenche men'.<sup>1</sup> That conviction was doubtless increased after Mary's sudden elevation to the French throne and was assuredly not lessened by the arrival in August 1559 of a thousand French troops, intimating - or so the Congregation construed it - 'ane plane conquaist'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, according to English observers, the Congregation actually welcomed this last development because they believed it would 'so stirre and irritate the herts of all Scottish men' and so increase their own power that they would 'be well able both to expell the French out of Scotlande, and also the better achieve the rest of their hole purpose'.<sup>3</sup> These were, however, private views and speculations, and publicly the Congregation continued to emphasize the purely religious motives for their revolt. It was not until the very end of August that they chose to pose openly as a

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1. Knox, Works, vi, 35.

2. Ibid., i, 396-397; cf. CSP Scot., i, no.492, where Kirkcaldy of Grange reported, a week after Henry II's death, that the barons and commons of Scotland were 'inflamed' against France.

3. Knox, Works, iv, 72 (the observers were Sir Ralph Sadler and Sir James Croft).



patriotic as well as a Protestant organization.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, moreover, they did so in response to that same proclamation of the regent, dated 28 August 1559, in which she had accused the preachers of encouraging disobedience to the 'higher powers' in their slanderous and irreverent sermons. We have already seen that this provoked the most complete statement of the covenanting theory of resistance which the Congregation ever promulgated. It is noteworthy, however, that according to Knox this statement was composed only by 'sum men' (presumably the preachers themselves) and is no more than an addendum to the official 'publict letter' subscribed to by the Congregation as a whole.<sup>2</sup> It was this public letter, addressed 'To the Nobilitie, Burghis, and Communitie of this Realme of Scotland', which contained the Congregation's formal apology for their armed rebellion. It is significant, moreover, not only because it is undoubtedly the finest rhetorical exercise they ever penned, but also because it completely abandoned the religious justification for resistance they had hitherto employed.

In fact, the Congregation could hardly have been more explicit regarding the drastic rearrangement which their priorities had suddenly

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1. Although in a proclamation issued in mid-July the Congregation justified their seizure of the coining-irons in terms which anticipate the patriotic rhetoric they were soon to exploit more fully (see below, p.324).
  2. Differentiating between the two responses to the regent's proclamation, Knox says only: 'Besydis this, our publict letter, sum men answerit certane heidis of hir proclamatioun on this maner' (*Works*, i, 409). Its defence of the Knoxian attitude to the civil power suggests that the second response was the work of the preachers (perhaps of Knox himself), but it should be pointed out that it also talks at some length of 'the tyrannie of strangearis' and the oppression of 'our commun-wealth' - the main preoccupations of the 'publict letter'.



undergone. 'Giff religioun be not perswaidit unto yow', they declared (making significantly light of the obligations inherent in covenanting ideology):

yit cast ye not away the cair ye aucht to have  
ower your commun-welth, quhilk ye se manifestlie  
and violentlie rewynait befoir your eyis. Gif  
this will nott move you, remember your deir wyf-  
fis, children, and posteratie, your ancient  
heretagus and houssis ...<sup>1</sup>

As this suggests, the public letter represents the Congregation's final abandonment of the alien imperatives of the covenant in favour of the much more familiar and resonant accents of the language of the commonweal. In other words, like the rhetoric of the Anglophobe politicians of the 1540's, the letter was a deliberate attempt to harness to the Congregation's cause the powerful influence which the normative ideology of patriotic conservatism exerted over the sixteenth century Scottish political community. After all, if the threat to the commonweal and liberty of the realm now emanated from the old ally rather than the old enemy, this made no difference to the language in which the Scots' age-old fear of subjugation could best be articulated and aroused. Consequently, when the Congregation appealed to all those 'as beir naturall lufe to thare cuntrey' to defend 'our derrest brethren, trew members of our commun-welth ... most crewelie oppressit by strangeis', they merely echoed the language of Wedderburn's Complaynt of Scotland. Indeed, when they claimed that theirs was a righteous cause, undertaken in defence of 'your ancient rowmeis and heretageis, conquerit maist valiantlie, and defendit be your progenitouris against

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1. For the full text of the letter from which this and subsequent quotations are taken, see *ibid.*, i, 400-408.

all strangeairis, invaidaris of the same', they spoke in terms well known to the Scots since the days of Barbour's Bruce. In short, as the Congregation must themselves have calculated, in abandoning the language of the covenant and suggesting rather that anyone who opposed them was 'an ennemy to us, and to him self, and to his commun weill', they employed a mode of discourse which was not only more familiar to their compatriots, but which thereby also provided the most favourable terms available for describing their cause.

As we already know, however, there was more to the language of the commonweal than a belligerent patriotism. For if the commonweal was strongly associated with the idea of freedom, it was also intimately connected with the exercise of kingship. Of course, according to the most elementary of contemporary political theories, one of a king's two main functions was the defence of the realm and in that respect there was always an implied relationship between kingship and the commonweal. In a work such as Boece's History or Lindsay's Satyre, however, we have seen that the second function attributed to contemporary monarchs - the administration of justice - was linked if anything still more closely than freedom with the notion of the commonweal. In the Satyre, for example, it is none other than John the Commonweal who, tattered and destitute as a result of royal negligence, confronts Rex Humanitas and begs him to renounce his vicious ways, take Gude Counsall back into his favour, and rule with justice for the common good of all.<sup>1</sup> Lindsay was, moreover, a highly conventional thinker and it is clear that, aside from the perennial importance of freedom, it was the relationship between

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1. See above, pp.226-232.



kingship, justice and the commonweal - a relationship exemplified equally well in Boece's History - which constituted the basic conceptual framework for the majority of politically conscious Scots in the sixteenth century. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that the Congregation made the same paradigmatic connections, casting the regent in the role, as it were, of corrupt Rex Humanitas and themselves in that of champions and defenders of an oppressed John the Commonweal. Certainly, when in the Act of Suspension they described Mary of Guise as an 'enemy to our commonweal' and themselves as its 'favourers', it was to these familiar ideas of kingship as well as to the freedom of the realm that they made reference. Similarly, in their public letter, when they scoffed derisively and with telling repetition at the regent's claim to be 'ane cairfull mothir ovir this commoun-wealth',<sup>1</sup> they accused her not just of threatening its freedom, but also of imposing oppressive taxes, of debasing the coinage, of violating the ancient laws and liberties of the realm and, predictably enough, of ignoring Gude Counsall - the advice, that is, of her native born counsellors. In short, like Lindsay's archetypal Rex Humanitas, Mary of Guise had failed adequately to perform her regal functions and was jeopardizing the commonweal and liberty of the realm. Unlike Rex Humanitas, however, she showed no signs of heeding those who sought to remind her of her duties and obligations. Consequently, in order to protect the commonweal from any further tyrannical abuse, the

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1. The repetition is made all the more telling by the fact that the regent never actually used this phrase in her proclamation of 28 August, but merely assured her subjects that 'ye sall ever fynd with us trewth in promeisses and ane moderlie luif towartis all; yow behaifand your selffis our obedient subjectis' (Knox, Works, i, 399).



Congregation felt justified in moving beyond remonstrance to open resistance.

This last was obviously a quite critical step in the rebels' reasoning, but it was one which the Congregation tended to imply rather than openly to avow. In fact, neither in their public letter nor even in the Act of Suspension did they admit - far less attempt to justify - the fact that their proceedings amounted to an act of forcible resistance to duly constituted authority. The only hint, for example, that they might be following established constitutional practice is an oblique and parenthetical reference to Thomas Cochrane, the evil (and probably fictional) counsellor of James III who was believed to have been hanged at Lauder Bridge in 1482. Even here, however, the reference is aimed more at Mary of Guise's French advisers - 'quha better deserve the gallows than ever did Cochrane' - than at the regent herself.<sup>1</sup> Besides, as was suggested in an earlier chapter, the reign of James III culminating in his 'deposition' in 1488 was not generally construed as an example of legitimate aristocratic resistance to tyrannical rule until George Buchanan saw its potential as a precedent for the overthrow of Mary Stewart in 1567.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, even if the Congregation had anticipated Buchanan's radical reinterpretation of the legend, it is hardly likely that they would have dared openly to espouse it. After all, whereas Buchanan set out to justify a revolution which had already occurred, the Congregation were seeking much needed support for a rebellion whose fate still hung in the balance.

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1. Ibid., i, 402-403.

2. See above, pp.65-66 and 97-99.

Furthermore, they were doing so in terms of a language which made it both difficult and dangerous to construe their actions as radically anti-monarchical. For commonweal discourse stressed the supreme importance of the king as the symbol and source of freedom and justice without explicitly sanctioning any corresponding mechanism for his removal should he fail to perform his allotted tasks. Resistance and tyrannicide simply had no generally accepted status in the ideology of patriotic conservatism to which the majority of contemporary Scots subscribed. To be sure, it might be argued that the fate of many of Hector Boece's mythical kings provided prescriptive legitimacy for acts of tyrannicide which were well known among the Scottish political community. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that either Boece himself or anyone else before Buchanan read the early history of Scotland in this light.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, although there persisted in Scotland a tradition of radical political thinking associated with John Mair, there is nothing to indicate that his sophisticated constitutionalism had done anything to radicalize the normative language of Scottish politics.<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, George Buchanan who, exploiting the gap between the expectations and performance of royal government and endowing

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1. See above, pp.96-104. As we shall see in the next chapter, Buchanan's radical approach to Boece's kings may in fact have been anticipated (although only marginally) by the anti-Marian polemicist Robert Sempill in his poem Ane Declaratioun of the Lordis Just Quarrell of 1567.
  2. On Mair's constitutionalism, see above, pp.134-141. J. H. Burns, 'The Conciliarist Tradition in Scotland', Scottish Historical Review, XLII (1963), 89-104, has argued (pp.103-104) that the radical theories of Buchanan and his ilk were well received in later sixteenth century Scotland because 'the ground had been so well prepared' by Mair and his pupils. This may have been true of certain circles within the universities, but one may doubt its validity when applied to the wider context of the political community at large.



aristocratic resistance with both theoretical and prescriptive validity, first explored the possibility of adding a radical dimension to commonweal discourse. As we shall see, however, it was not a possibility which won immediate or overwhelming acceptance among the Scottish political community at large.

Clearly, therefore, although similar ideas to Buchanan's were certainly also available to the Congregation, they could be used only at the risk of challenging the highly conservative susceptibilities of those whose friendship they were actively courting. Consequently, the Congregation discussed them only in private,<sup>1</sup> while publicly they tried entirely to dissociate themselves from any attack on their lawful sovereigns, Mary Stewart and her husband, by concentrating on the iniquitous rule of one who was 'bott a Regent'.<sup>2</sup> Suspending a regent, after all, was a far cry from deposing a sovereign and the distinction gave the Congregation much more room to manoeuvre within the loyalist confines of commonweal discourse than was ever available to Buchanan. Indeed, it allowed them in the Act of Suspension to claim with quite breath-taking presumption, not only that Mary of Guise was governing 'plane contrarie' to the wishes of her daughter and Francis II of France, but that they themselves were actually acting in their

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1. For example, in a debate among the Congregation preceding the passing of the Act of Suspension, the preacher John Willock put forward an argument which, stripped of its religious accretions, is not too far removed from that later advocated by Buchanan and which was applicable, not just to the regent, but to any sovereign authority. Perhaps significantly, however, when asked for his judgment on Willock's discourse, Knox concurred only with the proviso that 'the iniquitie of the Quene Regent' should 'withdraw neather our heartis, neather yitt the heartis of other subjectis, from the obedience dew unto our Soveranis' (Knox, Works, i, 441-443).

2. *Ibid.*, i, 441.



sovereigns' 'name and authoritie'.<sup>1</sup> With the aid of these transparent fictions, the Congregation neatly side-stepped the issue which Buchanan was obliged to tackle head-on. The regent's suspension, far from being an act of resistance of dubious legality, was in fact a perfectly justifiable step taken not only in defence of Mary Stewart and the commonweal and liberty of her realm, but apparently also with her full knowledge and consent! This being the case, argued the Congregation, their cause was one from which no true lover of the commonweal could either withdraw or withhold his support.

Of course, defending the commonweal by no means precluded signing the covenant and, in emphasizing the regent's egregious tyranny, the Congregation did not entirely forget her manifest idolatry. Indeed, on several occasions in their propaganda, tyranny and idolatry are closely identified, while the defence of the 'true religion' is equated with the defence of the freedom and liberties of the realm.<sup>2</sup> But such attempts to Protestantize the language of the commonweal were not pursued very far by the Congregation. On the contrary, throughout the autumn of 1559, they continued to appeal to their countrymen in terms which firmly subordinated Protestantism to patriotism rather than

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1. Ibid., i, 444 and 448. Similarly, in a letter to the regent written immediately after her suspension, the Congregation accused her of acting 'direct contrair our Soveranes Lord and Ladyis will, which we ever esteame to be for the weall, and nott for the hurt of this our commoun-wealth'. They then went on to say that 'any auctoritie ye have be reassone of our Soveranis commissioun ..., the same, for maist wechtie reassones, is worthelie suspendit be us, in the name and authoritie of our Soveranis, whais counsall we are of in the effares of this our commoun-weall' (ibid., i, 449-450).

2. The best example is probably the Congregation's declaration of 3 October 1559, see ibid., i, 424-433.

deliberately conflated them.<sup>1</sup> For example, having clearly decided that there was more to be gained from playing on the Scots' hatred of outsiders than on their sympathy for the reformers, the Congregation directed letters to all parts of the kingdom emphasizing, as Knox tells us in his History, 'quhat dangear did hing ower all men, giff the Frensche sould be sufferit to plant in this cuntrey at thair plesour'.<sup>2</sup> The precise dangers which they dwelt upon are made clear in a letter which Archbishop Hamilton addressed to the regent from Paisley at the end of September 1559. For in it he warned his mistress that the people of the west were being incited to rebel 'for the defence and weill of the realm' and that they were being told that the French would occupy their lands, do away with the native nobility and rule Scotland as a province after 'the exampill of Brytanny'.<sup>3</sup> Propaganda such as this was evidently designed to appeal both to the xenophobia of the Scots in general and, more particularly, to the self-interest of a ruling elite which had much to lose should the reins - and profits - of government fall into the hands of foreigners. It was, moreover, a type of propaganda which, as J. H. Elliot has argued, found favour among rebel groups throughout early modern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Not

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1. See, for example, the letter from Arran to Lord Semple asking him to support the Congregation, if not because he favoured their religion, 'yit nevertheles for the commoun wealth and libertie of this youre native countrey' (The Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine, ed. A. I. Cameron [S.H.S., 1927], 428-429). In similar vein, Lord Erskine, the keeper of Edinburgh castle, was urged to support the Congregation as 'our tender freynd, brother, and member of the same commun-wealth with us' (Knox, Works, i, 415-417).

2. *Ibid.*, i, 417-418.

3. Mary of Lorraine Corresp., 427-428.

4. J. H. Elliot, 'Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe', Past and Present, XLII (1969), 35-56, esp. 47f.



surprisingly, therefore, when in October 1559 the Congregation addressed a Latin declaration to the princes of Christendom, they dwelt not on their religious grievances, but on their role as defenders of Scotland's ancient laws and liberties.<sup>1</sup> In other words, here as elsewhere in their propaganda, it was clearly in terms of the commonweal and not the covenant that the Congregation now chose to justify their actions. As they informed the regent on 16 October 1559, if she persisted in her 'evyll mynd toward the common-weall and libertie of this realme', then 'according to the oath quhilk we have sworne for the maintenance of the commoun-weall ... we will provide reamedy'.<sup>2</sup>

As we already know, the remedy prescribed by the Congregation was Mary of Guise's suspension from the regency. This apparently decisive move, however, far from marking the triumphant climax of the rebels' campaign, marked rather the beginnings of a sharp and rapid reversal in their fortunes. For in the months following her putative suspension, the regent firmly seized the initiative, pushing the Congregation onto the defensive and leaving them in no position either to make her deposition effective or to drive out her French troops. The former, indeed, would be accomplished only by Mary of Guise's death in June 1560 and the latter only by the intervention of England early in the same year.<sup>3</sup> The commonweal, it would seem, no more than the covenant, was capable of mobilizing the Scots in numbers sufficient to overthrow the established authority. In fact, loudly and lengthily as the Congregation

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1. Papiers d'Etat relatifs a l'Histoire de l'Ecosse au 16<sup>e</sup> Siecle, ed. A. Teulet (Bannatyne Club, 1852), 1, 414-428.

2. Knox, Works, 1, 437-438.

3. For a succinct account of the course of events following the regent's suspension, see Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII, 97-99.

protested their own and their countrymen's patriotic duty, there is little evidence to suggest that their use of commonweal rhetoric secured the positive response they expected from the political community at large.<sup>1</sup> Despite the unpopularity of the regent's administration, the Congregation's attempts to discredit her activities and justify their own in terms of the language of the commonweal had apparently failed to convince the majority of their compatriots of the legitimacy of their cause. That said, it is important now to examine what reasons contemporary Scots had for doubting the plausibility of the Congregation's professed aims and intentions. For this will shed light, not only on why they gained so little support, but also on the more general implications of their use of commonweal discourse.

### III

If credibility be ranked among the most treasured assets of any political movement, then it was the Congregation's singular misfortune that from the very outset their motives were questioned and their professed aims scoffed at and derided. At the same time, however, one must pay tribute to the formidable political acumen which led Mary of Guise immediately to brand the Congregation as a pack of power-hungry opportunists bent simply on the overthrow of her own and her daughter's authority. As has already been suggested, the forces of inertia - fear,

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1. Commenting, for example, on the Congregation's enforced withdrawal from Edinburgh in November 1559, Knox wrote that they were openly called 'traytouris and heretiques' by the native inhabitants, leading him to conclude sourly that 'we wald never have belevit that our naturall countrey men and women could have wisshed our destruction so unmercifullie, and have so rejoiced in our adversitie' (Works, i, 465).



apathy, the habit of obedience - all worked to her advantage, and these were amply reinforced merely by the regent standing on her considerable dignity and anathematizing the Congregation as a worldly and treacherous rabble. As early as May 1559, for example, she was pouring ridicule on the insurgents' claim to be in arms only for conscience sake and throughout the subsequent campaign she continually and scornfully reiterated her belief that the Congregation 'mentt no religioun, but a plane rebelloun'.<sup>1</sup> Such charges gained credence, moreover, when in July 1559 the rebels seized the coining-irons from the mint in order, as they said, to prevent further debasement of the coinage.<sup>2</sup> Such a blatantly political act seemed to substantiate the regent's accusations, while making nonsense of the Congregation's much-trumpeted distinction between obedience in temporal matters and disobedience only in things repugnant to God. The Congregation seem themselves to have realized as much, for according to Knox they then issued a 'publict proclamatioun' arguing that they 'did stay the printing irnes, in consideratioun that the commone wealth was greatlie hurt by corrupting of our money; and because that we war counsalouris of this realme, sworne to procure the proffite of the same ...'.<sup>3</sup> The full text of this proclamation has not survived, but this summary clearly intimates the dramatic change in the language of the Congregation's propaganda which was shortly to occur. Already the rebels were conscious that their covenanting ideology with all its sophisticated (or perhaps merely sophistical) devices for circumventing Romans 13 was no match for the regent's vigorous condemnation

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1. Ibid., i, 338.

2. Ibid., i, 364 and 371-373.

3. Ibid., i, 372.

of their activities as political blasphemy. Nor, indeed, by virtue of their own actions, was a purely religious justification of their revolt any longer plausible. They had, in short, little choice but to suffer the indignity of shifting their ground and taking up a position both less exposed to the regent's well-aimed barbs and more in keeping with their own behaviour.

It will be clear enough already that the stance the Congregation now chose to adopt - the defence of the commonweal and liberty of the realm - was by far the most advantageous available to them. After all, not only was it conceptually much more familiar to their compatriots, but it also allowed them both to legitimate such actions as the seizure of the coining-irons and to tap a sizeable reservoir of anti-French feeling. Nevertheless, it did not shield them from the regent's continued insistence that their real aim was the destruction of her own and particularly her daughter's power. The rebels were still ill-equipped to counter the extremely damaging assertion that their intention was neither religious reform nor the commonweal of the realm, but rather, as Mary Stewart herself opined, 'the subversicoun of our authoritie, and usurpacioun of our Crown'.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the emergence of the duke of Chatelherault and his son the earl of Arran as nominal leaders of the Congregation in September 1559 did nothing to enhance their credibility. For was it not these fickle and devious Hamiltons - heirs presumptive to the Scottish throne on the failure of the Stewart line - who stood to gain most should the regent and her daughter be deposed? Their prominence in the Congregation's ranks simply lent

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1. Ibid., i, 364.



additional credence to the regent's assertion that the insurgents wished only 'to pervert the haill obedience' and accomplish 'ane plane usurpation of authoritie'.<sup>1</sup> Ample testimony to the effectiveness of this argument is provided by the Congregation's own reaction to it. For on the eve of the regent's suspension they felt obliged to issue a declaration explicitly denying that the Hamiltons had any designs on the throne,<sup>2</sup> while in the Act of Suspension itself they claimed (as we saw) that, far from acting against their true sovereigns, Mary Stewart and Francis II, they were actually acting in their name and authority. It is hard to imagine that the Scottish political community found such protestations of allegiance any more convincing than did Mary herself. The Scots' loyalty to the Stewart dynasty was doubtless based as much on pragmatism as on principle, but the spectre of a Hamilton succession can only have reinforced it.

As a threat to the Congregation's credibility, however, the Hamilton connection fades into comparative insignificance when set beside the rebels' dealings with England. For if, as the Congregation so clamorously insisted, the regent and her French lackeys threatened the commonweal and liberty of the realm, what of they themselves and their English paymasters? In fact, it is important to recognize that

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1. Ibid., i, 423.

2. See 'The Purgation of the Duik' (ibid., i, 439-440) where Chatelherault 'planelie protestis, that neather he nor his said sone suittis nor seikis any preeminence, eather to the Croune or Authoritie, bot als far as his puissance may extend, is readdy, and ever shalbe to concur with the rest of the Nobilitie his brethren, and all otheris whais hartis ar tweiohet to manteane the commoun cause of religioun and liberty of thair native cuntrey, planelie invaded be the said Regent and hir said soldiouris, wha onlye does forge sick vane reportis to withdraw the heartis of trew Scottisemen from the succour thai aught of bound dewitie to thair commoun-weall opprest'.

the Congregation's Anglophile policy was based on something more than their desperate need for financial and military assistance. As Arthur Williamson has amply documented, key figures in the Congregation were inspired by an apocalyptic vision of a reformed Britain uniting the realms of Scotland and England in a Protestant empire capable of withstanding even the Satanic powers of the papal Antichrist.<sup>1</sup> They were, in effect, the natural heirs of the unionist ideology developed by the likes of Henrysone and Somerset in the 1540's in support of the marriage of Mary Stewart to Edward Tudor.<sup>2</sup> In the First Blast, for example, Knox construed the persecution currently afflicting his brethren in Britain as a result of 'the proude rebellion and horrible ingratitude of the Realmes of England and Scotland' and went on to explain that when God had offered 'the meanes by the whiche they might have been joyned together for ever in godly concorde, then was the one proud and cruel, and the other inconstant and fickle of promise'.<sup>3</sup> In his History also, Knox's sympathy with the unionist ideas propounded in the 1540's is clearly apparent in his account of the Rough Wooing. The initial opportunity to unite the realms through marriage was, for example, a 'wonderfull providence of God', while successive English invasions were seen as evidence of God's 'anger', 'judgment' and

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1. See Arthur H. Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI : The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture (Edinburgh, 1979), esp. 11-16; cf. the same author's 'Scotland, Antichrist and the Invention of Great Britain', in New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland, ed. John Dwyer, Roger A. Mason and Alexander Murdoch (Edinburgh, 1982), 34-58, esp. 36-42. What follows in this and the next paragraph owes a considerable debt to Dr. Williamson's pioneering studies.

2. See above, chapter 5.

3. Knox, Works, iv, 394.



'revenge' in the face of the Scots' stubborn ingratitude.<sup>1</sup> Much the same sentiments as these are uttered, moreover, in a brief pamphlet entitled An Admonition to England and Scotland to call them to Repentance which was published along with Knox's Appellation in 1558.<sup>2</sup> Written by Anthony Gilby, an English Marian exile and Protestant controversialist, the Admonition similarly castigates the people of 'Britanie' - 'for of that name both [i.e. Scotland and England] rejoyseth' - for not effecting the 'godlie conjunction' which the marriage promised. Satan, lamented Gilby in rhetoric identical to that found in the unionist literature of the 1540's, 'and Antichrist his sonne, could not abyde that Christ should grow so strong by joynynge that Ile together in perfect religion, whome God hath so many waies coupled and strengthened by his worke in nature'.<sup>3</sup> Within a year of the Admonition's publication, however, it seemed that God in His mercy - and through the agency of the Congregation - had seen fit to provide the Scots with a means of redeeming their earlier sinfulness. With the accession of Elizabeth, hopes of union were once more revitalized and the arguments of Henrysone and Somerset once more assumed practical significance.

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1. Ibid., i, 101-102, 119, 122 and 214. The consonance of Knox's thought with that of Somerset and Henrysone is further evidenced in his encomium of Edward VI and his belief that: 'After the death of this most verteous Prince, of whom the godless people of England, (for the most parte,) was nott worthy, Sathan intended nothing less then the light of Jesus Christ utterly to have bein extinguished, within the hole Ile of Britanny' (ibid., i, 242-244).
  2. Reprinted in ibid., iv, 553-571.
  3. Ibid., iv, 554, 558 and 560. More particularly, Gilby blamed the 'pestilent generation' of Scottish priests for ensuring that Mary Stewart married in France rather than England 'mindinge by that meanes to cutt for ever the knot of the frendship that might have ensued betwixt England and Scotland by that godlië conjunction' (ibid., iv, 560).

Certainly, it is in precisely this light that Knox's activities in 1559 must be interpreted. Even before his return to Scotland in May, for example, he was writing to William Cecil requesting an opportunity to talk to him of 'soche things as willingly I list not to commit to paper'. What this cryptic remark refers to is made clear in a further letter of June 1559 in which the preacher repeated his request for an interview and went on to affirm that his 'eie [= eye] hath long looked to a perpetual concord betuix these two Realmes, the occasion wharof is now present'.<sup>1</sup> By no means every member of the Congregation shared these unionist sympathies, but by mid-July the rebels as a whole (presumably under Knox's influence) were writing to Cecil of a 'confederacie, amitie, and leigue' between the two realms which, being done 'for God's cause', would be quite unlike 'the pactions maid by warldlie men for warldlie proffeit'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, during the summer of 1559, hardly a letter crossed the border without some reference to what William Kirkcaldy of Grange called that 'perpetuale freyndschip betwene the tuo Realmes which presently is easy to be done'.<sup>3</sup> Of course,

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1. See *ibid.*, vi, 20 and 31-32. Cf. *ibid.*, vi, 46, where in a further letter to Cecil Knox wrote suggestively that he 'understood the materis in which I have labored ever sence the deathe of King Edward, now to be opened unto you'. The letter-bearer was Alexander Whitelaw of New Grange for whose efforts in the cause of union, see Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness, 13.
  2. Knox, Works, ii, 25. In the same letter, the Congregation wrote: 'As tuicheing the assurance of a perpetuall amity to stand betuix these twa Realmes; as no earthlie [thing] of us is more desyred, so crave we of God to mak us instrumentis by whiche this unnatural debaite, whiche long hath continued betuix us, may anis be composed, to the prais of Goddis name, and to the confort of the faithfull in boyth realmes' (*ibid.*, ii, 24). Similar sentiments are expressed (somewhat less fulsomely) in a letter sent to Elizabeth at the same time (*ibid.*, vi, 43-44).
  3. *Ibid.*, vi, 33. For many other such references, see Book III of Knox's History (in Works, ii, lff) and the Congregation's correspondence with England as collected by Knox's editor (*ibid.*, vi, lff).



friendship with England was a practical necessity for the Congregation, but there is no reason to doubt that many of their number were genuinely attracted to the unionist ideology first propounded by the Protestants of the 1540's. Certainly, in the same way as their precursors, some of the Congregation were keen to cement the 'league' by means of a dynastic marriage. On this occasion, however, it was not to be a Tudor-Stewart match, but rather one between Elizabeth and the Hamilton earl of Arran. Such an idea was mooted at least as early as June 1559 and negotiations to that end were to continue for some considerable time.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it seems unlikely that the Congregation's leaders would have left unconsidered the possibility of hastening complete dynastic union by the simple expedient of setting aside the claims of the Stewart line. The notion certainly occurred to Cecil who endorsed a memorandum which, after recognizing the Hamiltons as heirs presumptive to the Scottish throne, went on to say that if Mary Stewart did not agree to the Congregation's demands 'then is it apparent that Almighty God is pleased to transferr from her the rule of that kingdom for the weale of it'.<sup>2</sup> Understandably enough, the Congregation were never so explicit about their ultimate intentions. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that the accession of Chatelherault and Arran to the rebel cause was seen by many as an essential step towards the realization of that Protestant and imperial British realm first envisaged in the unionist propaganda of the 1540's.

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1. See CSP Scot., i, no.465, for the June reference. For further details, see Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness, 12, and Read, Mr. Secretary Cecil, 147-148. Arran, then resident on the continent, was clearly hastened back to Scotland with the English government's connivance and he was probably led to believe that marriage to Elizabeth would be his reward for joining the Congregation.

2. CSP Scot., i, no.537.

In the present context, however, the precise details of the Congregation's plans for a future Britain are less important than the fact that their Scottish contemporaries had good grounds for seeing them as an 'English' party bent on promoting some form of union with the old enemy. For even if there was, as seems possible, a growing body of opinion in Scotland favourable to closer and more amicable relations with England, the idea of union - and particularly one which passed over the ruling Scottish dynasty - would have appalled the majority of Scots. Furthermore, even if the rebel leaders sincerely believed that union was in Scotland's best interests, such a belief was wholly inconsistent with the main thrust of commonweal rhetoric as both they and the Scottish political community at large employed it. Indeed, incorporating the vocabulary of freedom and predicating the exercise of justice within an autonomous kingship, the language of the commonweal was quite antithetical to the unionist policy espoused by the Congregation's leadership. Consequently, openly to have avowed the nature of their dealings with England would have exposed the rebels' declared commitment to the commonweal and liberty of the realm as a hollow sham. Like the 'assured lords' of the 1540's, their stance as selfless patriots would have lost whatever credibility it ever possessed.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the Congregation never publicly aired their Anglophile policy and conducted their negotiations with Elizabeth's ministers in the utmost secrecy. Nevertheless, their compatriots were well aware that something was afoot and in late June and again in early October 1559 the regent made pointed references in her public proclamations to 'messageis to and fra Ingland' and to the

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1. See above, pp.199-200.



rebels' 'seiking support of England'.<sup>1</sup> The Congregation were in no position to deny such accusations, but neither could they afford to be completely honest about their intentions. Consequently, they fell back on self-righteous obfuscation, declaring in October 1559 that the extent of their dealings with England would shortly be made 'manifest unto the warld, to the prayse of Godis haly name, and to the confusion of all thame that sclander us for sa doing'.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime the slander presumably continued apace; and presumably continued also to cast doubt on the Congregation's commitment to the commonweal and liberty of the realm. Nor, in fact, were the insurgents ever likely to be in a position to reveal the true nature of their dealings with England. For to have done so would not only have destroyed their credibility in Scotland, it would also have alienated the queen of England.

Although it seems probable that William Cecil did favour the idea of dynastic union mooted by the Congregation, there is nothing to suggest that his mistress did.<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth flirted with Arran as she flirted with so many ardent suitors, but to marry him or, still worse, to ignore the legitimacy of the Stewart line's claim to the throne of Scotland, were courses of action which she could not countenance. For

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1. Knox, Works, i, 364 and 422-423.

2. *Ibid.*, i, 427.

3. It is worth recalling that Cecil had accompanied Somerset on his Pinkie campaign of 1547 as a colleague of William Patten on the Marshalsea court (see above, p.174). His support for union, however, was doubtless based on practical rather than apocalyptic considerations and was centred on his concern for English security rather than on a belief in the providential role of a British monarchy.

Cecil, however, the Scottish situation presented problems of more immediate practical import than that of the future possibility of matrimony and union. For not only did he have to convince Elizabeth of the wisdom of doing anything at all about her northern frontier, but having done so he had to provide her with acceptable grounds for intervention in the affairs of another kingdom. Religion was clearly a non-starter with the queen and Cecil was doubtless greatly relieved when in October 1559 Knox was replaced by the more urbane William Maitland of Lethington as the Congregation's go-between in the English negotiations. Equally, intervention on the basis of England's well-worn claim to feudal superiority over Scotland, although considered by Cecil, would hardly have been welcome to Scots who could still recall Henry VIII's use of the same pretext.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the only grounds which were neither anathema to Elizabeth nor impolitic in Scotland were precisely those which the Congregation adopted in late August 1559 : namely, the defence of the freedom and liberties of the realm without in any way derogating from the authority of Mary Stewart, the lawful sovereign of Scotland. The rebels' initial adoption of this stance, however, does seem to have been a response to the Scottish pressures already discussed rather than to the importunities of their English allies. For it was not until November 1559 that Cecil finally instructed them to present their case to Elizabeth in terms which, ignoring the question of union and even that of religion, emphasized instead their loyalty to Mary Stewart and their desire only to free their realm

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1. See Read, Mr. Secretary Cecil, 150-151, for Cecil's consideration of the claim to superiority. For its use in the 1540's and the Scots' reaction to it, see above, chapters 5 and 6.



from French tyranny and oppression.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, however, the Congregation had a two-fold reason for couching their propaganda in the language of the commonweal. Indeed, they were left with little choice, for to have done otherwise would have lost them the backing of England as surely as it would have diminished their support in Scotland.

Ironically enough, therefore, the two central planks of the Congregation's platform - religious reform and amity or union with England - are completely absent from their propaganda after November 1559. If their private correspondence remained preoccupied with these concerns, circumstances had conspired to force the Congregation into a public posture based exclusively on loyalty to Mary Stewart and the commonweal and liberty of her realm. Thus on 27 March 1560 they summoned the neutral lords of Scotland to join them in besieging Leith and, wholly ignoring the religious issue, urged them, on pain of being reputed 'playne enemyes to the common weile of this our native countrey', to help put the realm 'to lybertie and fredom'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a week or so later, they wrote to the regent offering her a final chance to withdraw French troops peaceably from Scotland and insisting that they were driven to the extreme of armed resistance only for the preservation of the freedom and liberties of the realm.<sup>3</sup> Predictably, moreover, it was

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1. The instructions were passed on to the Congregation by Sir Ralph Sadler and are printed in The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler, ed. A. Clifford (Edinburgh, 1809), 1, 566-573. That they followed them to the letter is evident from the instructions the Congregation gave to Maitland of Lethington before he left Scotland to continue negotiations at the English court (see *ibid.*, 1, 604-608).
  2. *Ibid.*, 1, 713-714.
  3. CSP Scot., 1, no.712. For similar examples emphasizing the Congregation's loyalty to Mary Stewart, see *ibid.*, 1, nos.755, 806 and 831.

precisely these secular concerns - and none other - which were adumbrated in the formal document by which Elizabeth agreed to intercede on the Congregation's behalf. In the Articles of Berwick, signed on 27 February 1560, the English queen pledged to help the Scottish insurgents 'onlie ... for the defence of the fredome of Scotland from conquest', while the Congregation themselves were obliged to aver that they did not intend to 'wythdraw ony dew obedience' from Mary Stewart provided that she neither subverted nor oppressed 'the just and ancient liberties' of the realm.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth's intervention on these terms proved decisive. With an English navy in the Forth and an English army in the Lowlands, many erstwhile neutral Scots found it expedient to admit the justice of the Congregation's cause. Perhaps crucially, however, it was a cause which had changed out of all recognition from that which, twelve months before, had aimed only to ensure that God's Word was 'truly preached' and His Holy Sacraments were 'rightly ministered'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, when the conflict was finally ended by the Treaty of Edinburgh in July 1560, the issue of religion was not even mentioned. By the terms of the treaty, the Scots were once again left free to enjoy their freedom and liberties and were once again to be governed by their native political elite, but their confessional allegiance was left wholly undetermined.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Congregation emerged victorious, then, they had ostensibly achieved only those objectives which they were forced to

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1. Knox, Works, ii, 51; cf. CSP Scot., i, nos. 702 and 786.

2. See above, p. 293.

3. For an abridged version of the treaty, see Source Book of Scottish History, ii, 171-175.



espouse sometime after they originally rose in revolt. Of course, over the next few months, they were to implement sweeping ecclesiastical reforms and to continue covertly to negotiate a dynastic union with England. Yet paradoxically the temporary abandonment of these aims - at least in public - had proved essential to the success of their rebellion. In order to win the support of Elizabeth and to gain at least the semblance of respectability in Scotland, the Congregation had been obliged to construe their actions, not as a Protestant crusade, but as a patriotic insurrection against the tyranny of France. They had had to do so, moreover, without impugning their allegiance to their lawful sovereign, Mary Queen of Scots. Given the conservatism of Scottish political society and the effectiveness of the regent's own propaganda, this last was the most crucial as well as the most difficult operation which the Congregation were called upon to perform. It is clear, in fact, that they never wholly allayed their countrymen's suspicions as to their ultimate intentions. With the intervention of England, however, those who still mistrusted the Congregation's propaganda had to make do with whatever guarantees the rebels were prepared to offer. In this regard, one further document is worth consideration, for in the course of April and May 1560 the Congregation drew up and signed the third and last of their famous Bands.<sup>1</sup> This final 'covenant' is of particular interest because, although (like its predecessors) it committed the signatories to 'the Reformatioun of Religioun, according to Goddes word', it did so only in the vaguest terms, while going on (unlike its predecessors) to concern itself primarily with the commonweal. Thus the principal undertaking entered into by the subscribers

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1. For the full text of the Band, see Knox, Works, ii, 61-63.

was that, aided by 'the Quene of Englandis armie', they would:

effectuallie concur and joyne togidder ... for  
expulsioun of the said strangeris [i.e. the  
French], oppressouris of oure libertie, furth of  
this Realme, and recovery of oure ancient fre-  
domis and liberteis; to the end, that in tyme  
cuming, we may, under the obedience of the Kyng  
and Quene our Soveranis, be onlie rewillit be the  
lawis and customeis of the cuntrey, and borne  
men of the land.

Clearly, this was a covenant of a quite different type from those which the Congregation had entered upon in former days. So different, in fact, that it could be signed, as Knox put it, not only by those 'professing Chryst Jesus in Scotland', but also by 'dyveris utheris' - including the conservative earl of Huntly - 'that joynit with us, for expelling of the Frenche army'.<sup>1</sup> One can only surmise that the Third Band's vague commitment to religious reform was far outweighed in the eyes of Huntly and his ilk by its firm commitment both to the freedom of the realm and to the reigning Stewart monarch. With the arrival in March of an English army, such an undertaking on the part of the Congregation - in the familiar form of a bond - may have tipped the balance in their favour, ensuring the quiescence of their opponents and paving the way for their eventual success.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV

The Third Band provides an appropriate point at which to end our detailed analysis of the Congregation's propaganda and to summarize

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1. Ibid., ii, 61.

2. For a similar view, see Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII, 101-102.



what we have learned from it of the ideological context in which the Reformation took place. Perhaps the first and most obvious point to be made is that both the content of the material and the manner in which it was deployed serve further to confirm that sixteenth century Scots were, as this study has suggested several times before, highly conservative political thinkers. There seems no doubt, for example, that the rebels' abandonment of Knox's covenanting rhetoric and their adoption instead of the language of the commonweal was a deliberate attempt to redescribe their activities in the normative language of the political community at large and thus to legitimate their rebellion in the terms most likely to elicit widespread sympathy, approval and support. As we know, that language was centred on an essentially medieval conception of kingship and was primarily concerned with the two fundamental functions - the maintenance of the freedom of the realm and the equitable administration of justice within it - which a king was conventionally expected to perform. It was in these relatively unsophisticated terms that pre-Reformation Scots habitually described and discussed the political world they inhabited and, under the circumstances prevailing in 1559, it is perfectly understandable that the insurgents should have abandoned the alien and unattractive imperatives of the covenant in favour of this more familiar mode of discourse. In so doing, however, they fell subject to certain important constraints. For in order to maintain the plausibility of their commitment to the commonweal, the Congregation were obliged - at least in public - to subordinate their Protestantism to their patriotism, to suppress their desire for a dynastic union with England, and to proclaim their allegiance to their lawful sovereign, Mary Stewart. The majority of Scots clearly remained sceptical about the motives behind these ideological

manoeuvres, but a combination of factors - not least the intercession of Elizabeth - saw the Congregation emerge nevertheless as victors over the regent. In a sense, however, although they went on to initiate some of the ecclesiastical reforms they desired, it was not the Congregation who benefited most from the widespread use of commonweal discourse in Reformation Scotland. Arguably, in fact, the real beneficiary was none other than Mary Queen of Scots.

Fortuitous deaths play a disproportionately important role in the history of the Scottish Reformation and that of Mary Stewart's husband, Francis II of France, was by no means the least significant of them. He died in December 1560 after a reign of only eighteen months and, just as his premature accession had altered the state of affairs in Scotland, so too did his premature demise. For it suddenly and quite unexpectedly freed his widow to return to her native realm as an adult monarch with an incontestable right to the Scottish throne. Given all that we have already said and implied here about the language of the commonweal and hence about the conservative susceptibilities of the Scottish political community, then one would expect the prospect of a return to a traditional style of kingship - albeit under a woman - to have been warmly anticipated in Scotland. After all, the commonweal depended on the freedom of the realm and the equitable administration of justice within it, while an independent monarch was perceived as the symbol and guarantor of both. Consequently, as Mary was now free of her French ties, had no obligations towards England, and was returning to her native realm to govern it in person, Scots who valued the commonweal should have rejoiced as they had not done since the death of Mary's father, James V, in 1542. In this respect, old Sir Richard Maitland (Lethington's father) undoubtedly spoke for many of his compatriots when he wrote:



Now sen thow art arryvit in this land,  
 Our native princes and Illustir quene,  
 I traist to god this regioun sall stand  
 Ane auld fre realme as it lang tyme hes bein;  
 Quhairin richt sone thair sall be hard and sein  
 Grit Ioy, Iustice, gude peax and pōlicie,  
 All cair and cummar banist quyt and clein,  
 And ilk man leif in gude tranquillitie.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, one could ask for no more succinct statement of the values and expectations embodied in commonweal discourse and, Knox's baleful comments apart, there is little to suggest that the Scots viewed their queen's return - regardless of her religion - in anything other than such hopeful, albeit apprehensive, terms.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there was little that the Congregation could do about it. Throughout their revolt they had publicly insisted on their loyalty to Mary, while during much of it they had posed as selfless defenders of precisely those things which her return now seemed to promise. They had been trapped by the logic of their own propaganda : if they could claim credit for a successful defence of the commonweal and liberty of the realm, it was Mary Stewart

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1. 'Off the Quenis Arryvale in Scotland', ll.9-16, printed in The Maitland Folio Manuscript, ed. W. A. Craigie (S.T.S., 1919), 32-34. Cf. Alexander Scott's poem 'Ane New Yeir Gift to the Quene Mary', in The Poems of Alexander Scott, ed. James Cranstoun (S.T.S., 1896), 1-8, where similar sentiments are expressed in terms reminiscent of David Lindsay.
  2. For Knox's characteristic comments on Mary's arrival in Scotland, see Works, ii, 268-269. A more objective contemporary assessment of the likely impact of the queen's home-coming is provided by Maitland of Lethington in a letter to Cecil of August 1561. Acknowledging the considerable support Mary would win among both Catholics and Protestants, he went on to emphasize the dangers to the Congregation if she returned and the dangers to the country if she did not: 'I assure you this whole Realme is in a miserable case. If the Queen our Sovereign come shortly home, the dangers be evident and many; and if she shall not come, it is not without great peril; yea, what is not to be feared in a Realm lacking lawful government?' The letter as a whole is of considerable interest and can be consulted in Robert Keith, History of the Affairs of Church and State in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1844-50), iii, 211-216.

who stood to reap the benefit of the patriotic conservatism which they had sought to arouse and exploit.

For four years, in fact, between her return to Scotland in August 1561 and her marriage to Darnley in July 1565, Mary's rule proved remarkably successful. Despite both her youth and her sex, she was able to reassert royal authority and to establish a degree of unity among the political elite which, in the words of Gordon Donaldson, 'had hardly been paralleled since 1513'.<sup>1</sup> To that extent Mary undoubtedly did fulfil the conservative expectations of the majority of her subjects and, in so doing, ensured both their loyalty and her own popularity. Nevertheless, the realm over which she presided remained in a potentially explosive state, for the issues which had lain at the heart of the Congregation's rebellion - religious reform and amity or union with England - were still not fully resolved. To be sure, as regards the religious question, the 'Reformation Parliament' of 1560 had abolished the mass and approved a Protestant confession of faith, but not only did Mary persistently refuse to ratify this settlement, but she also insisted on maintaining her own allegiance to Catholicism. Consequently, Knox and his colleagues remained in constant fear of a Catholic reaction aimed at overthrowing a reformed church which was still only precariously established and which had yet to win widespread public approval. That no such reaction ever occurred was probably due less to Mary's lack of religious conviction than to the exigencies of international diplomacy. As we shall see, the guiding

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1. Donaldson, Scotland : James V-James VII, 113. For a succinct study of Mary and her reign, see the same author's Mary Queen of Scots (London, 1974). Cf. Antonia Fraser, Mary Queen of Scots (London, 1969).



light of Mary's policy was her claim to the English throne and, while hope remained that either she or her heirs might realize that goal, she was reluctant to alienate Elizabeth's Protestant subjects by persecuting their brethren in Scotland. At the same time, however, until negotiations with England were satisfactorily completed, she could not afford to antagonize France and the papacy by herself renouncing Catholicism. Not surprisingly, therefore, Mary chose to temporize and thus to adopt the dangerously anomalous role of a nominally Catholic queen ruling a nominally Protestant realm. It was a difficult part to play, but Mary's position at home was greatly eased by the rift which developed among the reformers themselves. Indeed, the deteriorating relations between the radical Protestants led by Knox and the moderates led by Lord James and Maitland of Lethington is worth closer examination. For they are revealing both of the ideological problems faced by Scottish Protestants after the return of their Catholic queen and of the pressures which would finally erupt in the upheaval of Mary's deposition.

Just as Knox had always been suspicious of his noble allies' worldly ambitions, so the nobility had ever been fearful of Knox's outspoken commitment to the imperatives of the divine will. It was for this reason that the preacher was kept at arm's-length during the negotiations over Mary's marriage in 1558 and it was for the same reason that Lethington replaced him as the Congregation's 'secretary' in October 1559. The preacher's ceaseless reiteration of God's will was simply a liability to a party which could ill-afford to alienate potential supporters - either Scots or English - among whom godliness and worldliness were mingled in unquantifiable proportions. Not surprisingly, therefore, as early as January 1560, only nine months after

his return to Scotland, Knox was writing to an English friend that 'I am judged amongis ourselves too extream, and be reason therof I have extracted myself from all public assemblies to my privat study'.<sup>1</sup> However, even the products of his private study proved contentious when they saw the light of day. When in January 1561, for example, the First Book of Discipline was finally presented to 'the Great Councill of Scotland now admitted to the Regiment' it met with determined opposition.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the proposal that the entire patrimony of the old church should be given over to finance the new was quite unacceptable to a nobility which had been engrossing ecclesiastical lands and revenues for years. In effect, the social and economic transformation which Knox deemed necessary for the creation of a godly commonwealth could be achieved only with the willing consent of its principal victims. Understandably, the nobility became increasingly uncooperative and, in the face of Knox's "devote imaginations", the consensus among the godly began to crumble.<sup>3</sup> Under such circumstances,

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1. Knox, Works, vi, 105.

2. For a brief discussion of the opposition, see The First Book of Discipline, ed. J. K. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1972), 12-14. There was apparently also some opposition to the Confession, Thomas Randolph (the English ambassador in Edinburgh) reporting to Cecil in September 1560 that Lethington and Lord James were trying to 'mytigate the austeritie of maynie wordes and sentences which sounded to proceade rather of some evle conceaved opinion, than of anie sounde judgement'. More particularly, they thought the 'chapiter of the obediens or dysobediens that subjectes owe unto their magistrates' contained 'unfeet matter to be intreated at thys tyme, and so gave their advice to leave yt owte' (see CSP Scot., i, no.902).

3. For Knox's impressions of what he saw as the nobility's worldly obstructionism, see Works, ii, 128-130. For further details of the financial provisions and implications of the Book of Discipline, see Gordon Donaldson, The Scottish Reformation (Cambridge, 1960), 63-65.



the return of Mary Stewart was bound to exacerbate the tension which already existed between the radicals and moderates within the reformed church. As we shall see, Lord James and Lethington reacted cautiously, prepared to tolerate their queen's return but determined not to relinquish control of government policy. Knox, however, was implacably opposed to any such compromise : after all, Mary was an idolatress and the reintroduction of the mass to the very heart of the realm was a negation of all his ministerial labours and all the Congregation had so recently achieved.<sup>1</sup> The divide between them proved unbridgeable : by the end of 1561, the nobility and ministers were at loggerheads and Knox was lamenting that the queen and her courtiers had drawn 'unto thame some of the Lordis' who 'wold nott convene with thair brethren, as befoir thai war accustomed'.<sup>2</sup> Knox's godly council now had a rival in the queen's privy council and the nobility were clearly loath to jeopardize their standing in the latter by their participation in the former. Inevitably, in the wake of Mary's return, relations between the erstwhile allies steadily worsened and Knox's influence over the nobility dwindled to negligible proportions. By 1563, indeed, Knox had so completely severed contact with Lord James that 'familiarlie after that tyme thei spack nott togetther more than a year and half'.<sup>3</sup>

Tantalizingly close as the Congregation had come to realizing Knox's dream of a godly commonwealth ruled by a godly prince, it is

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1. As he later commented: 'That one Messe ... was more fearful to him than gif ten thousand armed enemyes war landed in any pairte of the Realme, of purpose to suppress the hoill religioun' (Works, ii, 276).

2. *Ibid.*, ii, 295.

3. *Ibid.*, ii, 382.

small wonder that the return of an idolatrous queen not only provoked his anger and dismay, but also prompted some of his most radical political pronouncements. As early as October 1561, for example, only two months after the queen's arrival, Knox registered his disgust at the nobility's acquiescence in Mary's mass and opined that 'remedie there appeareth none, unless we would arme the hands of the people in whome abideth yitt some sparkes of God's feare'.<sup>1</sup> As the preacher well knew, however, such a solution was wholly impractical without the active support of the nobility. Consequently, over the next few years, he restated and developed the theory of resistance which he had first adumbrated in exile and, in a series of interviews with the queen and again in the General Assembly of 1564, argued not only that the nobility had a right to depose an idolatrous sovereign, but that it was their bounden duty so to do. Although the point is well enough made in Knox's celebrated clashes with the queen, it is the lengthy debate with Lethington in the General Assembly of June 1564 which provides the most interesting restatement of the preacher's political beliefs.<sup>2</sup> For it was on this occasion that Knox, making full use of the crucial distinction between the power ordained by God and the person who happened to wield that power, went on to argue quite unequivocally 'that the Prince may be resisted, and yit the ordinance of God nocht violatit'.<sup>3</sup> There is, however, much more to this debate than a last full-scale defence of a proposition prefigured in Knox's Appellation of 1558 and developed

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1. Ibid., vi, 130.

2. For Knox's own graphic accounts of his interviews with the queen, see *ibid.*, ii, 277-286, 331-335, 371-376, 387-389 and 403-412. For the General Assembly debate, see *ibid.*, ii, 425-461.

3. Ibid., ii, 436. See also above, pp. 283-285.



in the Congregation's propaganda of 1559. For Knox also took this opportunity to remind his audience that the Scots were now a covenanted people upon whom God had 'wrocht no less myrakill ..., baith spirituall and corporall, than he did unto the carnall seid of Abraham'. Just seven years before, he argued, the Scots had laboured under tyranny and bondage, but since then God had 'multipleyit knowlege, yea, and hes gevin the victorie to his treuthe, evin in the handis of his servandis'. Consequently, he concluded, 'gif ye suffer the land agane to be defyleit, ye and your Princess sall boith drink the coupe of Godis indignatioun, sche for hir obstinat abydeing in manifest idolatrie, ... and ye for your permissioun and mentenyng hir in the same'.<sup>1</sup> In effect, Scotland had now attained the same status in the eyes of God as Knox had accorded to England in his Appellation. They were a covenanted people - a people now formally bound to uphold the divine law - and if, like England under Mary Tudor, they repudiated the will and the Word of God, they would surely suffer the plagues and abominations their wickedness so richly deserved.<sup>2</sup> To Knox at least, therefore, the remedy was clear: 'I am assureit', he declared, 'that nocht onlie Goddis pepill may, but also, that thai ar bound' to execute God's law against their sovereign, 'having no further regaird to him in that behalf, than gif he had bene the moist simpill subject within this

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1. Ibid., ii, 443-444.

2. On Knox's distinction in the Appellation between a covenanted England and an uncovenanted Scotland, see above, pp.289-290. In the 1564 debate, Knox does not refer explicitly to the Scots covenanting with God, but he does compare them to a biblical people whose 'league and covenant' with their king - 'to wit, "That the King and the peopill sould be the people of the Lord"' - was broken by the king who was promptly punished with death (Works, ii, 448-449).

Realme'. More particularly, he argued, a covenanted Scotland had now no option but to fulfil the divine ordinance that idolaters - including their queen - should 'dey the deith'.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, such a solution was not one which commended itself to either Lethington or the earl of Moray (to which title Lord James was elevated in 1562). Although Moray in particular was by no means indifferent to religion, the policy of both men was dictated primarily, not by the imperatives of the divine will, but by their desire to promote and secure dynastic union with England.<sup>2</sup> Of course, with Mary securely set upon the Scottish throne and Arran showing signs of incipient madness, the Congregation's old idea of a Hamilton-Tudor match was no longer feasible. There was, however, a further alternative in that, were Elizabeth to die childless, Mary Stewart had without doubt the strongest claim to the English crown. The Scottish queen was herself well aware of the position and it was with the throne of England firmly in her sights that she allied with the Protestant Anglophile party on her return to Scotland and allowed Moray and Lethington to proceed with negotiations with Elizabeth aimed at gaining the latter's recognition of her claim.<sup>3</sup> It proved a tortuous and

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1. Ibid., ii, 453 and 441.

2. Their aims are well documented in the relevant volumes (i and ii) of CSP Scot. For detailed analyses of their individual careers, see Maurice Lee, James Stewart, Earl of Moray : A Political Study of the Reformation in Scotland (New York, 1953), and E. Russell, Maitland of Lethington (London, 1912).

2. Of course, if (as in Catholic eyes) Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn was null and void, Elizabeth was an illegitimate usurper and the English crown already rightfully Mary's. This argument had been well known to Mary since Elizabeth's accession in 1558, but she was prepared to forgo it in return for formal recognition as Elizabeth's heir.



interminable business, the details of which need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that, despite all the promises and pressures which were brought to bear, Elizabeth simply refused to name Mary as her successor. As a result, after three years of frustrating and ultimately futile diplomatic activity, the Scottish queen tried to force Elizabeth's hand by marrying Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, son of the earl of Lennox and grandson of Margaret Tudor, who stood next to Mary in the succession to the English crown. The marriage was a personal and diplomatic blunder of the first order. For not only did Darnley himself prove a wholly unsuitable match for Mary, but the combination of their claims to the English throne met with Elizabeth's stern disapproval. At a stroke, the marriage completely destroyed the policy of rapprochement with England which Moray and Lethington had pursued so painfully and so persistently since Mary's return to Scotland in 1561. Moreover, to Moray at least, the marriage seemed also to herald a Catholic reaction which might threaten the Protestant settlement for which he had fought in 1559 and which hitherto Mary had been obliged to tolerate. Not surprisingly, therefore, shortly after the marriage took place in July 1565, Moray rose in rebellion. It proved a dismal and damaging failure.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, in the present context it is not without significance, for the flurry of propaganda which accompanied it provides an interesting link between the ideas propounded by the Congregation in 1559 and the stance adopted by the Confederate Lords in 1567.

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1. For details of the rebellion and the events leading up to it, see Lee, Earl of Moray, Ch.6.

This can best be illustrated by examining a declaration which Moray issued in defence of his actions from Dumfries on 19 September 1565.<sup>1</sup> Essentially an attempt to counter the charges of 'sedition, rebellion and treason' which Mary had levelled against him and his supporters, the declaration was designed to demonstrate that the rebels 'have done nor intended nothing but that of duetie becometh the faithfull of God and true subjects to do to their prince, native countrie, and commoun weale of the same'. Accordingly, it proceeds to outline the two issues which had prompted Moray to resort to arms and to explain why his actions were not only justified, but deserving of support. Not unnaturally, the first issue was that of religion. Moray could and did argue with some degree of accuracy that Protestantism was now the official religion of the Scots or, to use his own phraseology, that it had 'pleased God to shew his mercifull countenance toward us, and to establish his true religioun through this whole realme, by parliament of the assemblie of the estats'. According to the declaration, however, it was now all too clear that the queen was intent on suppressing 'the true religioun, and us, the professors therof' and on re-establishing 'that ungodlie and wicked religioun wherin her Grace hath beene brought up'. Mary, of course, had never ratified the acts of the Reformation Parliament and the whole Protestant settlement was in consequence technically illegal. The rebels' main purpose was, therefore, to oblige Mary finally to legalize what her subjects had agreed upon in the parliament of 1560 and thereby 'to have the forsaid

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1. The declaration is printed in full in Calderwood, History, ii, 569-576. For further examples of Moray's propaganda, see CSP Scot., ii, nos. 243 and 244.



true religioun ratified and confirmed by publict law'. Yet this was not their only aim, for as well as 'the actioun of religioun', the rebels were also concerned with 'the policie and commoun wealth'. In particular, they claimed to be profoundly uneasy at Mary's neglect of 'the wholsome advice and counsell of her Majestie's ancient nobilitie and barons' and her apparent preference for:

the advice and counsell of such men, strangers, as have nather judgement nor experience of the ancient lawes and governance of this realme, nor naturall love toward her Majestie nor subjects therof; but being men of base degrie, and seeking nothing but their owne commoditeis, expone the greatest and weightiest effaires of government and justice to their owne privat commoditeis.

The declaration then proceeds to accuse these (unspecified) sources of 'sinister counsell' of a variety of acts detrimental to the commonweal of the realm. They are blamed, for example, for establishing a king (i.e. Darnley) over the Scots without the consent of parliament and clean against 'the ancient lawes and liberteis of the realme'; for 'the delapidating and waisting of the patrimonie and propertie of her Majestie's crown ... to the manifest danger of the estat, and great greefe and hurt of the lieges'; for 'the divisioun that is raised between nobilitie and nobilitie, barons and barons, merchants and craftsmen, with the remanent estats of this realme'; and, finally, for granting unwarranted remissions - 'wherupon the justice of this realme cheefelie dependeth' - 'which must bring subversioun to the estat royall, and to the whole realme in the end'. It is these issues and abuses which have led Moray and his friends to take up arms and, concludes the declaration, 'considering that this is the truth and cannot be denied', all those 'that serve God unfainedlie or mind to have anie part in this commounwealth' should join with the rebels 'to the obteaning of reformatioun of the enormiteis forsaid'.

It is clear from this that Moray had learned at least some of the lessons of the Congregation's experience in 1559. As one might expect, for example, there is no mention whatsoever of his plans regarding Scotland's future relations with England. Similarly, although the declaration by no means ignores the matter of religion, it nevertheless avoids the extremes of Knox's covenanting rhetoric and concentrates instead on the much more telling point of the queen's apparent contravention of her subjects' wishes as expressed in the parliament of 1560. In other words, the imperatives of the divine will are suitably tempered - if not wholly diluted - by their transmutation into the wishes of the three estates. Of course, this was an option which had not been available to the Congregation, but after the sitting of the Reformation Parliament to equate the 'true religion' with the 'laws and liberties' of the realm was a perfectly legitimate and increasingly successful strategy. In the same way, if the declaration is careful to avoid the heights of Knoxian rhetoric, it is equally careful to avoid any direct attack on the rule of the queen herself. Couching their grievances in the familiar terms of commonweal discourse, the rebels pointed the finger instead at the traditional scapegoats of disaffected aristocrats: the evil counsellors of base degree whose corrupting influence has led to the monarch's neglect of her natural advisers, to the inequitable administration of justice and to the near destruction of the commonweal of the realm. As we know, this was a scenario with which Moray's contemporaries were perfectly au fait and, if there is no mention of Cochrane and his cronies in the declaration, there is little doubt that it was they or their archetypes in Boece's chronicle who would have sprung to the contemporary mind. For all that, however, the rebels' appeal to this familiar



paradigm fell largely on deaf ears and Mary was able to crush their revolt with relative ease. In fact, the rebellion was probably doomed from the start, not simply because Mary was able to reassure all but the most zealous Protestants that she intended nothing against their religion, nor even because Moray's grievances sounded like the sour grapes of a displaced office holder, but principally because (unlike in 1559/60) the rebels were unable to prevail upon Elizabeth to intervene on their behalf. Although she offered money and eventually even asylum, the English queen was unwilling on this occasion to initiate proceedings which would have led to war not only with Scotland, but also with France.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, Moray was left with the thankless task of turning the conservative Scottish community against a queen whose governance had thus far proved immensely popular. Understandably enough, he failed completely and was obliged to seek refuge at the English court.

If Moray's rebellion was conspicuously unsuccessful, however, the so-called 'Chaseabout Raid' nevertheless revealed cracks in the hitherto smooth facade of the Marian regime which were to grow immeasurably wider over the following two years. Indeed, in one respect at least, Moray's disaffection was shared by many of his fellow magnates who, if they were not prepared to follow him into open revolt, were certainly not slow to echo his bitter complaints against the evil counsels of those of base degree.<sup>2</sup> In particular, their anger was focused on the queen's

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1. For details of Elizabeth's problems and prevarications over Moray's revolt, see Read, Mr. Secretary Cecil, 338-346.

2. For examples of this, see CSP Scot., ii, nos. 191, 264, 265, 284, 335, 346, 351 and 352.

Italian secretary, David Rizzio, who from humble beginnings as a musician had risen high in Mary's favour. The details of the plot which led to Rizzio's savage murder by a group of nobles ostensibly led by Darnley himself need not concern us here. It is worth pointing out, however, that when the assassins set out to justify what they had done, they were careful to insist that the brutal act - committed virtually in the queen's presence - was not intended to 'subtrak' any obedience from the queen herself. On the contrary, they claimed simply to have acted against an upstart 'strangear' whose influence over Mary had not only put many of the queen's noble counsellors in danger, but had also threatened the commonweal of the realm.<sup>1</sup> In part, as in the case of Moray and of the Congregation, such protestations of allegiance were clearly meant for English consumption. Primarily, however, at least in this case, they were intended to mollify and reassure the Scottish political community at large whose inbred conservatism - as the plotters well knew - would hardly countenance a direct attack upon the person of the sovereign. Despite her marriage to the worthless Darnley, Mary's popularity and the loyalty it engendered remained a signal feature of the Scottish political scene which her opponents could not afford to ignore. For the latter, indeed, it was truly fortunate that Mary herself simply took such loyalty for granted and proceeded to outrage rather than to cultivate the conservative susceptibilities of the community over which she ruled.

The details of the events leading up to Mary's downfall - the murder of Darnley, her marriage to Bothwell, her imprisonment and

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1. Ibid., ii, no.362: 'A writting pennit be the Secretar [i.e. Lethington] efter the slaughter of Segneour Davie, to have bene send to the nobilitie the yer 1565'.



subsequent escape from Lochleven - are much too well known to bear repetition here.<sup>1</sup> What is worth stressing, however, is the fact that, despite the increasing eccentricity and ineptitude of her behaviour, the majority of Scots continued to support a queen who was manifestly failing in her duty towards them. To be sure, even if Mary was implicated in the plot, few of her subjects (saving the members of the house of Lennox) will have mourned the passing of 'that luckless popinjay', Henry, Lord Darnley.<sup>2</sup> But Mary's subsequent marriage to the maverick earl of Bothwell, the man who was generally held to have carried out Darnley's murder, was a blunder of staggering proportions which sent shock-waves throughout the political community. Temporarily, indeed, and for the first and only time, it united the majority of Scots in open opposition to their lawful sovereign. It was an opportunity which the Confederate Lords - as Mary's opponents now styled themselves - could not afford to miss. Nor did they : within a month of the marriage in May 1567, they had assembled an army representative of a fair cross-section of the Scottish political community to which Mary had no choice but to surrender. Yet the unity displayed at Carberry was undoubtedly much more apparent than real. While, for example, there was general support for a move to 'liberate' Mary from Bothwell's clutches, the Confederate Lords' subsequent actions met with something far short of unanimous approval. After all, forcibly to restrain an errant sovereign, to free her of the self-interested counsels of an ambitious courtier, was one thing; but to depose her and even to

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1. For a succinct account, see Donaldson, Mary Queen of Scots, Ch.4.

2. William Ferguson, Scotland's Relations with England : A Survey to 1707 (Edinburgh, 1977), 87.

threaten her life was quite another. Mary's foolish antics had certainly strained her subjects' loyalty to the uttermost, but it had not broken it. She could still rely on an underlying and instinctive conservatism which placed deposition far beyond the limits of her subjects' political experience or beliefs. In recognition of this stark reality, the Confederate Lords went to considerable lengths to insist that Mary had not been deposed at all, but that she had 'frelied of our awin motive will' demitted office in favour of her son, the year-old James VI, and voluntarily appointed the earl of Moray as regent.<sup>1</sup> It is clear, however, that the generality of Scots believed the queen's abdication to have been extorted by force and when Mary did escape from Lochleven in May 1568 there was no shortage of sympathy and support for her cause. Indeed, within little more than a week of her escape, she had mustered an army of considerable size which, although defeated by Moray at the battle of Langside, was by no means routed and might not only have been rallied but also reinforced.<sup>2</sup> Mary, however, did not stay to regroup her forces. Instead, her nerve apparently broken, she fled across the border to England.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that Mary's flight to England was a fatal error which proved decisive not only for her own future, but more importantly for the future of the realm over which she

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1. See the formal documents by which Mary 'agreed' to the transfer of authority in Source Book of Scottish History, ii, 191-198.
  2. See Donaldson, Mary Queen of Scots, Ch.5, for a detailed analysis of the queen's party which clearly reveals the extent of support for her cause. Some indication of her strength is provided by the fact that, while twelve earls were with her in May 1568, only five had attended the coronation of James VI in July 1567.



had ruled. In particular, with Moray left at the Scottish helm, it was at last possible fully to implement those policies of religious reform and amity with England for which the Congregation had fought in 1559 and which were to lead eventually to the creation in 1603 of that Protestant and imperial British realm first envisaged in the 1540's. In a sense, however, such an outcome represented the triumph of hope over expectation and can hardly have seemed likely to those directly responsible for Mary's deposition. After all, the majority of Scots were no more (and probably less) inclined to support the Confederate Lords in 1567 than they had been to join the Congregation in 1559. Indeed, it seems almost certain that, had Mary remained in Scotland, she would have had little difficulty in ousting Moray and re-asserting the royal authority which few Scots seemed willing to impugn. As it was, however, she fell into the hands of Elizabeth and with her fell also the fate of the Scottish realm. In a sense, therefore, it was Elizabeth rather than the Scots themselves who determined the final outcome of the Reformation crisis in Scotland. For by holding Mary in captivity and propping up a succession of Protestant and Anglo-philic Scottish regents, she not only deprived the Marian party of any focus or purpose, but also gave the reformed church sufficient breathing-space to take firm root in the northern kingdom. Paradoxically, however, such support as they received from Elizabeth made it more difficult rather than easier for Moray and his party to justify what had occurred in 1567. For, as in 1559, the English queen would not extend the hand of friendship to a movement which admitted to the heinous crime of opposing and ultimately deposing a lawfully constituted sovereign. Not surprisingly, therefore, at the York-Westminster conference convened by Elizabeth so that she might 'arbitrate' in the

dispute between Mary and her subjects, the regent continued to insist that the queen had simply abdicated voluntarily.<sup>1</sup> Presumably, this transparent fiction was believed by Elizabeth no more than it was believed by the majority of Scots. Nevertheless, for the English queen at least, it was a great deal safer and more convenient than the radical political theories to which Mary's deposition gave rise. It is to these radical theories, however, and particularly to that of George Buchanan, that we must now turn our attention. For it is in the works of Buchanan that we find the first full-scale attempt to add a revolutionary dimension to the conservative and highly conventional structure of sixteenth century Scottish political thought.

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1. See Gordon Donaldson, The First Trial of Mary Queen of Scots (New York, 1969), 189.



## Chapter Ten

Buchanan and the Stoic King

On the 18th July, 1567, less than a week before Mary signed the documents by which she 'voluntarily' demitted office, Sir Nicholas Throckmorton wrote to Elizabeth from Edinburgh to say that he had just had 'some conference' with the town's two ministers, John Knox and John Craig, and had found them 'verye austere' towards the queen and clearly bent on her immediate deposition. 'They are furnyshed with manye arguments', he wrote, 'some forthe of the Scriptures, some forthe of hystories, some grounded, as they say, apou the lawes of thys realme, some upon practyzes used in this realme, and some apou the condycyons and othe maid by theyre prince at her coronacyon.'<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Throckmorton does not reveal the details of these arguments and the 'hystories', 'lawes' and 'practyzes' of the realm to which Knox and Craig appealed are left unspecified. The very next day, however, Throckmorton penned another letter, this time to Cecil, in which he provided a useful clue as to the possible nature and provenance of the ministers' radical ideas. For with the letter he enclosed 'a tragical

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1. See The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing (Wodrow Society, 1846-64), vi, 553. Apparently, however, Knox quickly reverted to (for him) much more conventional arguments derived from Scripture, for the following day Throckmorton reported that the preacher 'did inveigh vehemently agaynst the Quene, and perswaded extremyte towardes her' by application of a text from 'the Bookes of the Kynges' (ibid., vi, 553). On the evidence of his contribution to the General Assembly debate in 1564, John Craig was much more likely to have had secular arguments to hand. For on that occasion he offered a wholly non-religious, contractual interpretation of political obligation, arguing 'that Princes ar nocht onlie bound to keip lawis and promeisses to thair subjectis, but also, that in caise thai faill, thay justlie may be deposeit; for the band betwix the Prince and the Peopill is reciproce' (ibid., ii, 456-9).

dialogue' which, despite proceeding 'from a poettes shoppe', he believed to contain the arguments upon which the Confederate Lords would act in depriving Mary of the authority.<sup>1</sup> This 'tragical dialogue' was almost certainly a poem entitled Ane Declaratioun of the Lordis Iust Quarrell in which two characters, Philandrius and Erideilus, dispute the lawfulness of deposing a tyrannical sovereign. The poem is anonymous but was probably the work of the anti-Marian polemicist Robert Sempill who, in Ane Exhortatioun to the Lords written immediately after Mary's surrender at Carberry, had already hinted at the type of radical ideas developed more fully in the Declaratioun.<sup>2</sup> As J. H. Burns has pointed out, many of these ideas are to be found 'almost verbatim' in the political writings of John Mair and it is therefore hardly surprising that the fundamental contention of the Declaratioun is that, as rulers derive their authority from the people, the people - or, more precisely, the nobility - may legitimately deprive them of it should they fail to perform their allotted tasks.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots 1547-1603, ed. J. Bain and others (Edinburgh, 1898), ii, no. 565.

2. For the full texts of both poems, see Satirical Poems of the Time of the Reformation, ed. James Cranstoun (S.T.S., 1891-3), i, 48-51 (Exhortatioun) and 57-64 (Declaratioun). Lines 105-112 of the Exhortatioun clearly prefigure the main arguments of the Declaratioun:

Sen Fergus first come in this land,  
Sic gude beginning never was sene,  
That gentilnes, at thair awin hand,  
Sa iust ane quarrell did sustene.  
Revoltis hes bene ma nor fyftene,  
And Princes in strang presoun set:  
Quhair all from bluid was keipit clene,  
Skantlie can I exampill get.

3. See J. H. Burns, 'The Political Ideas of the Scottish Reformation', Aberdeen University Review, XXXVI (1955-6), 251-68, esp. 264. The main thesis of the Declaratioun is expressed in the lines (155-6): 'May thay not put ane ordoure to the heid / Quha in beginning did the heid up mak?'. More generally, see 11.134-75.



Crucially, however, this principle is illustrated not simply by reference to Mair's own favourite example of John Balliol's deposition, but also by recourse to Hector Boece's account of Scotland's mythical prehistory. Indeed, for the very first time, the tyrannical lives and convenient deaths of so many of Boece's fictitious kings are endowed with explicit constitutional significance and such ancient Scottish monarchs as Evenus, Conarus, Ferquhaird, Donald V and Ethus are all cited as examples of vicious tyrants deliberately and legitimately deposed and imprisoned by their subjects.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not these are in fact the 'hystories', 'lawes' and 'practyzes' referred to by Knox and Craig must remain a moot point. Nevertheless, there is no doubting the importance of the lessons and precedents which the Declaratioun derived from Scotland's remote past. For it was with them very much in mind that George Buchanan set out to write both his brief tract De Jure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus and his much longer historical work, the Rerum Scoticarum Historia.

Although not published until 1579 and 1582 respectively, both of these works were written primarily to justify the revolutionary upheavals of 1567. The Dialogue, indeed, seems to have been composed in the immediate aftermath of Mary's deposition with the express purpose of

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1. See Declaratioun, ll.186-93:

Go, reid the buik, repeat the storyis auld:  
 King Evenus was keipit in strang hauld,  
 And deit thair. Conarus was inclosit,  
 First being dewlie for his fault deposit.  
 For wickit lyfe imprisonit was Ferquhaird,  
 Quha slew him self of proude melancolie.  
 Donald the fyft, he gat the same rewaird;  
 And Ethus did in prisone private die.

providing the actions of the Confederate Lords with the respectability and legitimacy which they so obviously lacked in the eyes of the majority of contemporary Scots.<sup>1</sup> However, in the face of Elizabeth's unswerving hostility to any form of political radicalism, the rebels made no immediate use of the principles and precedents adumbrated either in Sempill's Declaratioun or (presumably) in the earliest version of the De Jure Regni. Although Buchanan accompanied the earl of Moray to the meetings at York and Westminster, his time there was spent (as was that of the conference as a whole) debating Mary's complicity in Darnley's murder rather than defending the principles upon which the Confederate Lords might have acted in deposing her.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it was not until 1571 that the basic theses embodied in the De Jure Regni received their first public airing. The occasion for this was provided by Elizabeth's request that the Scottish rebels should restate their case against Mary and furnish more compelling and conclusive grounds for her continued detention in England than they had put forward in 1568. Accordingly, the earl of Morton was dispatched to the English court where he presented a 'wryting' which, as

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1. For a review of the evidence relating to the writing of the De Jure Regni, see H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Constitution', English Historical Review, Supplement 3 (1966), esp. 15-6, and I. D. McFarlane, Buchanan (London, 1981), 392-4.

2. For an account of the conferences, see Gordon Donaldson, The First Trial of Mary Queen of Scots (New York, 1969). Buchanan may have been responsible for drafting the Book of Articles containing the Confederate Lords' indictment of Mary's conduct. He was certainly the author of the scurrilous Detectio Mariae Reginae Scotorum which, although not published until 1571, originated in the conference proceedings and is closely related both to the Book of Articles and to Buchanan's account of Mary's reign in the Rerum Scoticarum Historia. On the relationship between these works, see The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stewart : George Buchanan's Account, ed. W. A. Gatherer (Edinburgh, 1958).



H. R. Trevor-Roper has persuasively argued, bears all the hallmarks of having proceeded from Buchanan's own pen.<sup>1</sup> The 'wryting' is in fact little more than an abstract of the De Jure Regni as we know it from the published edition of 1579. In other words, it is assumed that Mary is guilty of Darnley's murder and her deposition is defended by an appeal to natural laws which are said to be exemplified not only in the reigns of such recent monarchs as John Balliol and (for the first time in such a context) James III, but also in those of Scotland's ancient kings as described in 'our [i.e., Hector Boece's] cronikles'. Indeed, according to the 'wryting', Scotland's history - and particularly her early history - exhibited the workings of a polity more fully and more continuously attuned to the laws of nature and of God than that of any other contemporary political community. Consequently, in deposing their manifestly tyrannous queen, the Confederate Lords had done no more than to adhere to a paradigm of political conduct which was not only universally valid but to which their ancestors had also aspired with conspicuous and continuous success.<sup>2</sup> Whether Buchanan first encountered the rudiments of this theory in Sempill's Declaratioun or formulated it independently, there is no doubt either that it constitutes the main thesis of both the De Jure Regni and the Rerum Scoticarum Historia or that it is heavily indebted to Boece's own Scotorum Historiae. Like Sempill, indeed, although at much greater length and with much greater sophistication, Buchanan merely explored and exploited the radical implications of a conception of Scottish politics already extant in Boece's chronicle and widely shared by his

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1. See Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', passim.

2. The 'wryting' is printed in full in ibid., 40-50.

Scottish contemporaries. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, as well as proclaiming an unprecedentedly radical theory of political obligation, Buchanan's works also contain a classic - albeit highly classicized - interpretation of a theme which we have seen to dominate a great deal of sixteenth century Scottish political thought : namely, the nature of the relationship between kingship and the commonweal.

Although Buchanan's political writings have by no means suffered neglect, it remains true to say that the sheer conventionality of much of his thought has escaped the notice of modern historians more intent on studying the nature and sources of his undoubted radicalism.<sup>1</sup> Such an emphasis is perhaps inevitable and is certainly not unjustifiable. After all, as an advocate of elective, limited monarchy and an apologist for resistance and tyrannicide, Buchanan made a critical contribution to the development of a revolutionary political ideology in late sixteenth century Europe. Nevertheless, an over-exclusive concern with Buchanan the revolutionary monarchomach, the herald of popular sovereignty and modern constitutionalism, has done less than justice either to his thinking as a whole or to the Scottish context - both political and ideological - to which his major works primarily belong. The following analysis, therefore, is an attempt to reinterpret the Dialogue and the History in terms of the preoccupations and

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1. The most balanced, if all too brief, account of the arguments of the De Jure Regni is J. H. Burns, 'The Political Ideas of George Buchanan', Scottish Historical Review, XXX (1951), 60-8. The only serious and worthwhile attempt to come to grips with the History as well as the Dialogue is Arthur H. Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI : The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture (Edinburgh, 1979), 107-16, 122-6.



conventions of Scottish political thought as these have emerged in the foregoing chapters of this study. In this way, it is hoped to demonstrate that, despite both his radicalism and his classicism, Buchanan's thought conformed nevertheless to a pattern of political assumption and expectation which he shared with the majority of contemporary Scots. In a sense, indeed, it was precisely because he spoke (unlike Knox) in terms so well known to his compatriots that Buchanan attained the degree of attention and notoriety which he did. In other words, among friends and foes alike, the enormous impact of Buchanan's works depended not so much on the debatable novelty of their arguments nor even on their questionable logic and consistency, but on their skilful redeployment of beliefs and concepts with which the Scots had long been familiar. With this in mind, we may well begin our analysis with an examination of Buchanan's relations with King James VI. For, as we shall see, like so many of his contemporaries, Buchanan's political thinking had at its core a markedly conventional conception of the ideal prince.<sup>1</sup>

## I

The event which prompted the composition of the Dialogue - Mary's deposition in 1567 - also brought to the Scottish throne Mary's year-old son James VI. For at least a generation thereafter the young king was the focus of intense concern among the European Protestant communities. After all, as the titular head of one reformed kingdom and the

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1. Some of what follows (particularly the material relating to the Dialogue) has already been published in my 'Rex Stoicus : George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity', in New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland, ed. John Dwyer, Roger A. Mason and Alexander Murdoch (Edinburgh, 1982), 9-33.

possible successor to another, it was essential both to embattled continental Protestants and to those now more securely entrenched in Britain that he be brought up a 'godly prince' prepared to uphold and defend the 'true religion'. Consequently, the education of the young prince was a matter of serious import both at home and abroad. It was, moreover, a task for which Buchanan seemed particularly well suited. For not only was he (at least after 1561) an undoubted Calvinist, but he was also a humanist of international standing and a pedagogue of considerable repute. Born in 1506, prior to 1561 Buchanan spent most of his life on the continent.<sup>1</sup> Initially, a pupil of John Mair, he quickly abandoned what he saw as the theologian's arid scholasticism in favour of the Erasmian brand of evangelical humanism which was current in Paris during his sojourn there in the 1520's. With the exception of a brief return to Scotland (1535-39) and a spell in Portugal (1547-52), Buchanan remained in France for most of the middle years of his life, gradually establishing a reputation not just as a humanist teacher with liberal (not to say lax) theological views, but as a Latin poet of unparalleled distinction : poetarum nostri seculi facile princeps. Sometime around 1560, however, in circumstances which remain obscure, Buchanan rejected both Catholicism and his adopted French homeland. It is possible that he returned to Scotland in the entourage of Queen Mary in August 1561 as he was certainly closely associated with the court during the early years of Mary's personal rule. At the same time, however, he was also associated with the aristocratic leaders of the recently triumphant reforming party and

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1. For full biographical details, see McFarlane, Buchanan, passim, a work which effectively supersedes P. Hume Brown, George Buchanan : Humanist and Reformer (Edinburgh, 1890).



was soon playing a prominent role as a lay member of the General Assembly of the infant Kirk. By birth an adherent of the Lennox family, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the murder of Darnley should have thrust Buchanan into the arms of those who overthrew Mary in 1567. Certainly, there was no one better suited, by either past training or current reputation, not only to assume the role of ideologue for the rebel cause but also to supervise the education of the young king.

For twelve years, in fact, between 1570 and his death in 1582, Buchanan presided over the formal schooling of King James.<sup>1</sup> During these same years, he prepared the De Jure Regni, the History of Scotland and the politically significant play Baptistes for publication.<sup>2</sup> Now, while there is no clear evidence that the two activities were strictly related, it does seem probable that the one would have exerted some influence on the other. Certainly, all three of these works bear dedications to James VI which clearly suggest that, if they were primarily designed to justify rebellion, they were also seen by Buchanan as variations on the specula principum theme - as manuals,

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1. Buchanan shared responsibility with Peter Young, but there is no doubt that his was the guiding influence, at least until his health began to fail in 1578. For further details, see McFarlane, Buchanan, 445-50.
  2. As suggested above, the De Jure Regni was first written in 1567 or 1568 but, although MS copies were circulating in England by at least 1576, it is impossible to determine the extent to which it was revised (if at all) before publication in 1579. With the History more precision is possible. It seems likely that, although Buchanan may have started work on it before his return to Scotland, the bulk of it was written between 1566 and 1572 and extensively revised between 1576 and its eventual publication in 1582. (For further details, see Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', 17ff.) The Baptistes - essentially a study of tyranny based on the life of John the Baptist - was first written as early as 1540 but not published until 1577.

that is, of political guidance and instruction for his princely pupil. In the dedication to the Baptistes, for example, he wrote that the play:

may seem of particular interest to you as it clearly displays the torments and miseries of tyrants even when they seem to flourish the most. This I consider not only useful but also necessary for you to understand, so that you may begin at once to dislike that which you must always avoid.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, just as the Baptistes provided a model of tyranny to eschew, Buchanan thought his History contained many examples of kingship worthy of emulation. In dedicating it to James, he commented on the ill-health which had kept him from his charge and hoped the deficiency could be supplied 'by sending to you faithful monitors from history, whose counsel may be useful in your deliberations, and their virtues patterns for imitation in active life'.<sup>2</sup> A similar, if more forthright, message is conveyed by the De Jure Regni : Buchanan hoped it would prove a constant reminder to James of his duties towards his subjects and avowed that it was meant, not just as a monitor, but as 'a bold and assertive critic'.<sup>3</sup> Clearly Buchanan took his responsibilities with some seriousness. James was not only to be taught his classical letters, but also the manifold duties of his kingly office. In this respect, it is perhaps not insignificant that in his correspondence

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1. For the original Latin text, see Georgii Buchanani ... Opera Omnia, ed. Thomas Ruddiman and Peter Burmann (Leyden, 1725), ii, 217. The translation is my own.
  2. See George Buchanan, The History of Scotland, ed. and trans. James Aikman (Glasgow, 1827), i, civ. All subsequent references to the History are to this edition and I have used Aikman's translation throughout.
  3. George Buchanan, De Jure Regni Apud Scotos Dialogus (Edinburgh, 1579), dedication (unpaginated). All references to the Dialogue are to the facsimile reprint of this (the first) edition published in the English Experience series (Amsterdam and New York, 1969). All translations are my own.



Buchanan referred to the De Jure Regni simply as 'De Regno', a phrase which we may legitimately translate as 'On Kingship'.<sup>1</sup> The content of the work, moreover, amply bears out the appositeness of the simplified title. For, as will become clear, the Dialogue is not only structured in terms of a debate over the distinction between a true king and a tyrant, but has at its heart an imposing (albeit conventional) portrait of an ideal prince. Indeed, for all its radical arguments and implications, Buchanan's political philosophy may still best be characterized as an extended commentary on the nature and function of kingship.

Despite the importunate advice of his many Calvinist correspondents, however, Buchanan's conception of kingship bears little resemblance to the Knoxian ideal of a godly prince.<sup>2</sup> Remarkably secular and defined in austere moral terms, Buchanan's model was not biblical, but humanistic and classical. At least in outline, moreover, the portraits of virtuous kings and vicious tyrants - central to the Dialogue and abounding in the History - are far from original either to Buchanan himself or to humanists generally. On the contrary, they conform to conceptual patterns both long established in the western political

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1. To a friend in Zurich, Buchanan wrote: 'ad te mitto commentariolum nostrum de Regno' (see Opera Omnia, ii, 748). The phrase was also used by others of his correspondents. For example, Thomas Randolph remarked to Buchanan that 'De Regno is greatly desyred amonge us', while Daniel Rogers commented that 'Dialogismum de Regno ... avidissime perlegi' (ibid., ii, 746, 737). In similar vein, another contemporary referred to the work as 'de Principe dialogo' (quoted in McFarlane, Buchanan, 395).
  2. See, for example, the letters from Rodolph Gualter, Theodore Beza, Phillippe du Plessis-Mornay and Thomas Randolph in Buchanan, Opera Omnia, ii, 721ff.

tradition and perfectly familiar to his Scottish contemporaries. This can best be illustrated by turning to the De Jure Regni itself and examining in some detail the arguments which lie at its heart. The Dialogue begins with the return from France of one Thomas Maitland, Buchanan's rather spiritless partner in the ensuing conversation, who admits to having been taken aback by the outraged reaction on the continent to the murder of Darnley and the subsequent deposition of Mary. Buchanan, assuming Mary's complicity in the murder, argues in return that one cannot disapprove of the crime without approving of the punishment meted out to the criminal. Maitland replies, however, that the princes of Europe see things in a rather different light, viewing the deposition as a slight upon monarchical government, while their subjects, although generally approving of the humbling of tyrants, are confused over what precisely constitutes tyranny. In order to define it more clearly, therefore, Buchanan proposes to set up kingship and tyranny as opposites and, by explaining 'the origin and reasons for the creation of kings', by contraries, reveal what constitutes a tyrant.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, therefore, Buchanan goes on to discuss the beginnings of human society and the origins of political authority. Rejecting out of hand the assertion that human association is the product simply of utility or expediency, he maintains rather that the force which first brought men together was a natural impulse (vis naturae) implanted in all men which makes them shun the solitary life and seek companionship in society.<sup>2</sup> Pressed by Maitland to clarify his conception of this

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 1-7.

2. Ibid., 9-10.



natural force, Buchanan calls it 'a light divinely infused in our minds', a light which he further identifies with the law of nature, the ability to distinguish base from worthy things (turpia ab honestis) and, finally, with wisdom (sapientia).<sup>1</sup> This said, he feels able to conclude that it was neither orators nor lawyers who were the authors of human society but God Himself and that 'nothing on earth is more pleasing to God, than associations of men under the law which are known as states (civitates)'.<sup>2</sup> Although the precise meaning of this passage is not entirely clear, it does suggest that Buchanan closely identified nature, natural law and reason - all of which were thought to partake of and function in accordance with the divine mind - and that he believed that wisdom or right reason - reason, that is, in accord with nature - was the essence of moral worth in the individual and of justice and law in the state.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, he does assert at this point that 'nature never says one thing and wisdom another', while a little later in the Dialogue, presumably with reference to this passage, he tells us that, 'as has already been proved, the voice of God and of nature is the same'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as will become clear, in the context of his thought as a whole, it is fairly safe to assume that Buchanan understood God to have created the universe according to rational principles and to have endowed man himself with reason sufficient for the comprehension of those laws of nature by which he should govern both

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1. Ibid., 10-11.

2. Ibid., 11.

3. This interpretation is supported by the similarity of Buchanan's arguments to those of Aristotle and particularly Cicero, the latter of whom Buchanan explicitly cites as an authority at this point and to whom he was generally greatly indebted.

4. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 11, 30.

his own conduct and that of the political society in which he is naturally disposed to live. The significance of such an identification of nature, reason and law - and its presumed association with virtue - will shortly become apparent.

Having thus established, at least to his own satisfaction, the origins of society and the state, Buchanan now proceeds to an examination of the reasons for the creation of kings. Employing the age-old analogy between the human body and the body-politic, he argues that the latter is as susceptible to disease and ill-health as the former and, therefore, equally in need of the services of a physician.<sup>1</sup> In the state, he continues, this task is performed by the ruler whose principal function, as with the physician, is to maintain harmony (temperamentum) among the members of the body-politic or, more prosaically, to administer justice to his subjects.<sup>2</sup> Maitland, however, demurs at Buchanan's attribution to justice of the task of maintaining harmony when 'by its very name and declared character, temperance (temperantia) seems to claim these functions in its own right'.<sup>3</sup> But Buchanan retorts that it actually matters little to which of the two precedence is given, for all such virtues - by which he presumably means the cardinal virtues - are so interdependent that 'there appears to be one single function for all, that is, the restraint of inordinate passions (cupiditatum moderatio)'.<sup>4</sup> For Buchanan, in other words, it would seem that justice, ambiguously identified with temperance, is not

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1. Ibid., 11-12.

2. Ibid., 13-14.

3. Ibid., 14.

4. Ibid., 14-15.



so much a matter of administration per se as the state of equilibrium attained when the members of the body-politic are acting in harmony. How this will be brought about, however, only emerges when he comes to discuss the attributes of an ideal king.

'"The world is united by the example of a king"', argues Buchanan (quoting the poet Claudian), '"not even the laws sway the human mind as does the life of a ruler. The fickle mob changes always with the prince"'.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, the latter part of this dictum was quoted not only by John of Fordun in the fourteenth century but also by Sir David Lindsay earlier in the sixteenth.<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, a staple text of the mirror-of-princes genre and Buchanan, like so many of his Scottish predecessors, clearly saw the exemplary function of the king as crucial to the well-being of the polity over which he ruled. The prince was, after all, the supreme public figure, always on display and always under the watchful eyes of his subjects. His was the example which the people would follow and on him, therefore, rested responsibility for the moral bearing of his subjects and hence, most significantly of all, for the harmonious functioning of the body-politic. The people, opined Buchanan, 'are so disposed to imitate kings from whom shines forth some appearance of uprightness, so eager to emulate their manners, that they even strive to copy the faults in speech, in dress and in gait of those whose virtue they admire'.<sup>3</sup> To Buchanan, indeed, the potential inherent in a prince's example was all but unlimited:

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1. Ibid., 44.

2. See above, pp.31, 228.

3. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 44.

The idea [of a good prince] carries such great force in the minds of men that it readily accomplishes what neither the prudence of experienced lawyers, the science of philosophers, nor the experience accumulated in the arts during so many centuries, could ever achieve. In truth, what greater honour or dignity, grandeur or majesty, could be spoken of or imagined in any man, than that by his speech and converse, appearance and reputation, and finally by the silent image of him carried in men's minds, he reduces those wallowing in luxury to moderation, the violent to equanimity, and the mad to sanity?<sup>1</sup>

Although, as we shall see, Buchanan did seek severely to restrict the judicial and administrative responsibilities of kings, he clearly remained a profound believer in the prince's role as a moral dynamic capable of exerting a powerful influence - either for good or bad - over his subjects. In other words, like Fordun and Lindsay, Boece and Bellenden, he believed implicitly that a virtuous king inevitably reigned over a virtuous realm, while conversely a vicious ruler - a tyrant - inevitably presided over a corrupt one. It is, moreover, only in the light of this belief that there emerges the true meaning of Buchanan's earlier ambiguous identification of justice with temperance and his remark with respect to the king that all the cardinal virtues have a single function, 'the restraint of inordinate passions'. For the king is indeed the moral physician to the body-politic, maintaining the harmonious functioning (temperamentum) of its members, not so much by legislative enactment or judicial proceeding, as by the exemplary force of his own virtue. This was for Buchanan 'the true image of a king'.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, moreover, it was an image which his Scottish

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1. Ibid., 47.

2. Ibid.



contemporaries - long accustomed to viewing royal virtue as the key to the commonweal of the realm - would have instantly recognized.<sup>1</sup>

Conventional as this conception of the ideal prince undoubtedly is, however, Buchanan was by no means prepared to leave it at that. For if, as he contended, the purpose of kingship was to ensure the harmony or justice of the body-politic through the force of the prince's own example, problems still remained both as to how such a ruler was to be chosen and as to how he was to be maintained in the paths of virtue. It was in answering these questions - questions left largely unasked by his Scottish predecessors - that Buchanan laid the foundations of his radical theories of resistance and tyrannicide. At the same time, however, his answers also reveal aspects of his thought which, as we shall see, are of considerable interest in relation to the standard vocabulary of kingship employed by the majority of his compatriots. At the very beginning of the Dialogue, for example, Maitland tells us that, by the law of nature, all men are equal, so a ruler cannot be legitimately established without the people's consent.<sup>2</sup> But the art of government clearly requires special skills, particularly (we are told) that prudence or practical wisdom (prudentia) 'from which, as from a fountain, all laws that are useful for the conservation of human society must proceed and be derived'.<sup>3</sup> A man of the utmost

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1. In this respect, it is interesting that Buchanan paraphrases (*ibid.*, 53) the same passage from the fifth book of Aristotle's Politics (to which he explicitly refers his readers) which Bellenden drew on in characterizing the difference between kingship and tyranny as displayed in Boece's chronicle (see above, pp. 94-5).

2. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 15.

3. *Ibid.*, 18.

prudence would be 'a king by nature, not by election' to whom unlimited power might safely be entrusted. But such paragons of princely virtue are extremely rare and the people are generally obliged to choose lesser men who, only approximating to the ideal, may not be sufficiently strong to resist the pressures of their own affections. To ensure, therefore, that the less prudent prince does not act capriciously, the law is set up as 'his colleague, or rather as a restraint on his appetites (moderatrix libidinum)'.<sup>1</sup> This crucial statement prompts Maitland rather artlessly to inquire if Buchanan does not then think that royal power ought to be unlimited. To which the latter gives an emphatically negative reply:

Not at all, for I remember he is not only a king, but also a man, erring in many things through ignorance, sinning in many cases wilfully, and doing many things under constraint. He is, indeed, an animal, easily adjusting to every breath of favour and ill-will, a natural vice which his office as magistrate usually only increases ... Wherefore the most prudent men have recommended that the law be associated with him, to show him the way when he is ignorant and to lead him back to the way when he wanders from it.<sup>2</sup>

There is certainly in this argument many a springboard to a radical political theory. Not only, for example, is kingship said to be elective and thereby dependent on the consent of the electors, but the prince is clearly also being subjected rigidly to the rule of law. Before going on to discuss the implications of these ideas, however, it is necessary to look more closely at one further aspect of Buchanan's argument. For inherent in the passages quoted above is an identification of law, reason and virtue which, although crucial to Buchanan's

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 18-19.



thinking, is rarely commented upon at any length.

The king cannot be set free of the law, Buchanan tells us later in the De Jure Regni, because 'within a man two most savage monsters, lust and rage (cupiditas et iracundia), wage perpetual war with reason (ratio)'.<sup>1</sup> This basic presupposition about man's nature, never discussed at any length in his writings and never defined with any precision, must nevertheless be seen as the keystone of Buchanan's political philosophy. The closest he approaches to an explanation of it occurs in a passage towards the end of the Dialogue. There Maitland is led to remark that 'there is no monster more pestilential than man when ... he has once degenerated into a beast', prompting Buchanan to reply that:

You would say this much more emphatically if you considered how many-faceted an animal man may be and out of what a variety of monsters he is made ... It would be an infinite task to describe the nature of each one, but certainly two most noisome monsters, anger and lust (ira et libido), are clearly apparent in man. And what else do laws do, or strive after, but that these monsters be subjected to reason (ratio)? And when they do not comply with reason, may not the laws restrain them with the fetters of their sanctions? Whoever, therefore, loosens these bonds from a king, or anyone else, does not merely release a single man, but lets loose against reason two exceptionally cruel monsters and arms them to break down the barriers of the law. Aristotle seems to have said well and truly that he who obeys the law obeys God and the law, he who obeys the king, obeys a man and a beast.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., 32.

2. Ibid., 84. The reference is to Aristotle, Politics, III, xi, 4, but see also Nichomachean Ethics, V, vi, 5.

The language of this passage and the citation of Aristotle clearly indicate that Buchanan is drawing directly (albeit crudely) on the psychological theory of the ancient world. That is, he is describing man's nature in terms of the classical distinction between reason and the passions in the human soul. This language, however, is not merely descriptive of psychological faculties, it is also - indeed, for Buchanan, primarily - an ethical vocabulary in which the passions are universally vicious and reason (or prudence or wisdom)<sup>1</sup> the essence of virtue. Moreover, with his conventionally king-centred conception of politics, Buchanan invariably sees the conflict between reason and the passions - virtue and vice - being waged most significantly in the soul of the ruler. Not surprisingly, therefore, underlying both the Dialogue and the History, is the constant fear that the passions of the king will overcome reason and unleash the moral anarchy - the tyranny - which inevitably accompanies the unrestrained indulgence of a ruler's sensual instincts. Hence both the significance of law and of its identification with reason and virtue. Unlike the weak and vacillating ruler, the law is 'deaf to threats and to entreaties, maintaining one unswerving course'.<sup>2</sup> It is, as Aristotle tells us in the sentence immediately following that cited by Buchanan, 'wisdom without desire'<sup>3</sup> - reason free of human passion - and to it Buchanan would have the ruler conform both his speech and actions, bearing out

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1. I have been unable to detect Buchanan distinguishing in any consistent way between ratio, prudentia and sapientia. He appears to use them interchangeably and all imply a high degree of moral excellence.

2. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 20.

3. Aristotle, Politics, III, xi, 4.



the Ciceronian maxim that 'the king should be the law speaking, the law a dumb king'.<sup>1</sup> Only the ideal ruler possessed of perfect reason or prudence - 'steadfast against hatred, love, anger, envy and the other perturbations of the mind'<sup>2</sup> - can be said in any sense to be unbound by the law. For, indeed, such a paragon of princely virtue would himself be the law, both 'unto himself and unto others, expressing in his life what is commanded by the law'.<sup>3</sup>

The consonance of this mode of thought, not only with the preoccupations of the specula in general, but more specifically with the established norms of Scottish political discourse, will be readily apparent. Leaving aside for the moment the obviously crucial role played by the law in Buchanan's theory, his 'psycho-ethical' vocabulary of kingship is clearly closely akin to that employed by so many pre-Reformation Scots. In a sense, indeed, Buchanan had simply redefined the traditional idea of a struggle between the seven deadly sins and the seven theological and cardinal virtues - a struggle characteristic of works such as Boece's History, Lindsay's Satyre and Wedderburn's Complaynt - in terms of a more recognizably classical conflict between reason and the human passions. Steeped, as Buchanan undoubtedly was, in the literature of the ancient world, such a redefinition of virtue and vice - and, by extension, of kingship and tyranny - need hardly surprise us. After all, the distinction between reason and the passions derives ultimately from Plato and Aristotle. It was developed, however,

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 19-20. The reference is to Cicero, De Legibus, III, 1, 2.

2. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 31.

3. *Ibid.*, 29.

as a central tenet of Stoic philosophy and, despite his own reference to Aristotle, it is with Stoicism that Buchanan seems to have associated the doctrine. For Buchanan's ideal king, the prudent ruler impervious to the demands of his passions, is Rex Stoicus, the Stoic King. This conception, furthermore, he explicitly associates with the Roman Stoic, Seneca. Twice in the Dialogue when discussing the ideal ruler Buchanan refers Maitland to Seneca's tragedy Thyestes, on both occasions saying that therein is portrayed a model of the perfect prince.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the particular lines he had in mind are appended as a tailpiece to the Dialogue under the heading Rex Stoicus ex Seneca.<sup>2</sup> Put briefly, Seneca's portrait merely emphasizes that the true king is incorruptible and self-sufficient, unmoved by either riches or honour, ambition or the favour of the mob. It hardly matches the expectations generated by Buchanan's encomiastic references. Yet Seneca's tragedies as a whole could hardly be bettered as examples of the dire and vicious consequences following upon the unbridled indulgence of man's sensual appetites. The lesson was apparently not lost on Buchanan who presented young King James with a volume of 'Senecae Tragoediae' to complement the many humanist specula which already adorned the royal library.<sup>3</sup> Presumably he wished to impress upon James that only the Stoic King, ruthlessly subjecting his passions to the

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1. Ibid., 23, 47.

2. Ibid., 104.

3. See G. F. Warner, 'The Library of James VI 1573-83', in Miscellany of the Scottish History Society (S.H.S., 1893), i, xi-lxxv, at lxxix. Among the specula were works by Bude, Osorius, Maugin and Du Tillet. Buchanan himself presented James with the 'Institution of a prince par Synesius en francoys', a French edition of an oration delivered by Synesius, bishop of Ptolemais, to the Emperor Arcadius in 399.



rule of reason, could be a virtuous individual and a worthy ruler.<sup>1</sup>

Given such a conception of the ideal prince, it is only natural that Buchanan should have attached enormous importance to the upbringing and education of kings. In the Dialogue, for example, after Buchanan has described the perfect ruler as portrayed by Seneca, Maitland is made to exclaim:

Splendid, indeed, and even magnificent, so that it seems that nothing more magnificent could be said or imagined. But among the corrupt manners of our own times it is difficult for such greatness of soul to arise unless careful education is added to an honest character and to natural goodness. For the mind that is fashioned from childhood by good precepts and knowledge, and further strengthened by age and experience, strives to attain true glory through virtue ... And so, since a liberal education exerts such great influence on all conditions of men, how much care and solicitude is to be provided so that the tender minds of kings are correctly instructed even from the very first.<sup>2</sup>

It was doubtless precisely this (typically humanist) concern with education which underlay Buchanan's stern and overbearing attitude to James VI. We may legitimately discount Thomas Randolph's opinion that the young king was 'more happie that had Buchanan to his Master, than

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1. In the light of this concept of a Stoic King, it is interesting that Buchanan was dubbed 'a stoik philosopher' by a Scottish contemporary (see James Melville of Halhill, Memoirs of his own Life 1549-93 [Bannatyne Club, 1827], 262). While there are no grounds for believing that Buchanan was a Stoic in any formal philosophical sense (like Du Vair or Justus Lipsius), there is equally no doubt that he was deeply impregnated, as were many contemporary humanists, with Stoic ethics as interpreted and popularized (particularly by Cicero and Seneca) in late republican and early imperial Rome. For the general revival of such ideas, see Leontine Zanta, La Renaissance du Stoicisme au XVIe Siècle (Paris, 1914).

2. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 48.

Alexander the Great, that had Aristotell his instructor'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Buchanan, the professional pedagogue, no doubt took his duties seriously and set about moulding his charge in the image of a Stoic King. In this respect, his own History - like that of Hector Boece on which it is so heavily reliant - proved an invaluable source of example, inspiration and instruction. For the long and resplendent roll of Scottish monarchs, a roll stretching back to the fourth century B.C., provided many instances of kings whose abundant virtues permitted them, as in the case of King Convallus, to rule 'rather by the example and authority of his life, than by the severity of the law'.<sup>2</sup> It was to just such an ideal of princely conduct that Buchanan wished his pupil to aspire. However, although in dedicating the History he singled out David I as a fitting model for James to emulate,<sup>3</sup> he seems in fact to have followed John Mair in reserving his most extravagant praise for King James I. A prince both just and strong, according to Buchanan James also displayed such 'quickness and vigour of mind that he was ignorant of no art becoming a gentleman to know'. He was, indeed, the archetype of the Renaissance prince beloved of the humanists. Courageous in war and equitable in peace, James was also an excellent poet as well as an accomplished musician. Buchanan, however, considered the latter talents to be 'the flowers, more than the fruit of education; ornamental, rather than useful in the business of life'. For him, the real glory of James' rule lay in his grasp of that more significant

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1. Buchanan, Opera Omnia, ii, 746.

2. Buchanan, History, i, 245. For further examples of Buchanan's thoughts on the exemplary effects of royal virtue, see *ibid.*, ii, 186, 228-9, 261-2, 322-4, 572-3.

3. On David I, see *ibid.*, i, civ, 350-2, 357-8.



branch of philosophy 'which teaches the regulation of manners and the art of reigning'. It was these acquirements - exemplified in 'the conduct of his government and the laws which he enacted' - which underwrote the virtue of James I and which Buchanan undertook to instil in the mind of James VI.<sup>1</sup>

Yet if the History contains many examples of kings whose virtuous manners ensured the well-being of their realm and subjects, it contains also numerous instances of vicious rulers whose corrupt and tyrannous behaviour threatened to destroy the commonweal. Such a one was the evil prince Durstus, of whom James VI reputedly exclaimed: 'How durst he be sa evill? Thai micht have callit him Curstus, because he was curst, and had acurst us'.<sup>2</sup> As we know from Boece's chronicle, Durstus not only lost his throne, but was also slain by his subjects.<sup>3</sup> If to Boece, however, such a fate merely illustrated the paramount necessity of princely virtue, to Buchanan it was endowed with more profound constitutional significance. For in abandoning himself to profligate debauchery, Durstus also abandoned reason, virtue and the law, thereby rendering himself a fit subject for what James VI punningly considered the 'curse' of deposition.<sup>4</sup> The reasoning behind this judgment is made clear in the De Jure Regni. For there Buchanan argued

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1. Ibid., ii, 113-5.

2. See Warner, 'The Library of James VI', lxxdiii.

3. See above, pp.92-3, 96.

4. Buchanan's account of Durstus' reign occurs in History, i, 166-7, and is little more than an abridgement of Boece's more colourful version. Durstus is also one of the ancient kings referred to in the 'wryting' of 1571 as being legitimately deposed (see Travor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', 43-4).

that a tyrant who rules only to satisfy his own desires and appetites and ignores the rule of law, has no place in a society of men which depends for its very existence on the law.<sup>1</sup> According to the Dialogue, indeed, any man who places himself outside the law forfeits his right even to be considered human. Such creatures are not men, but 'wolves', 'noxious animals', 'monsters' with whom law-abiding persons should have no intercourse. In Maitland's view, therefore, they ought to be 'banished to uninhabited places, or sunk in the depths of the sea far from the sight of land, lest even the contagion of their bodies prove injurious to man'. Moreover, Maitland continues, he who kills these monsters 'benefits not only himself but also the entire commonwealth' and ought to be rewarded 'not only by the people but even by individuals'.<sup>2</sup> In this exchange the discussants are referring to men in general who live outside the law, but the implications are clear : the sub-human, animalistic tyrant, intent only on the satisfaction of his own desires and appetites and oblivious to reason and the law, is unfit not merely for rule but for life itself. Ultimately, indeed, Buchanan's theory of the passions can be made to justify even single-handed tyrannicide.

In the light of such a theory, it is small wonder that Boece's Scotorum Historiae proved so useful to Buchanan. For, however unintentionally, Boece's colourful tales of corrupt and vicious tyrants - many of whom died just as unsavourily as did Durstus - could all be interpreted quite readily as illustrations of Buchanan's revolutionary principles. The latter had merely to classicize his predecessor's account

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 55-6.

2. Ibid., 56.



of the perennial struggle between lust and temperance which raged in the breasts of Scotland's mythical kings and endow the outcome with explicit constitutional meaning. At the same time, however, Buchanan's close identification of reason and virtue with law opened up new possibilities which he was not slow to exploit. For it was by reference to the law that Buchanan was able to extend his somewhat primitive justification of tyrannicide based on psycho-ethical premises into a much more sophisticated theory of the accountability of kings couched in the language of natural rights. In so doing, he drew on the vast heritage of radical ideas developed by the medieval conciliarists as well as on the riches of the classical world as reinterpreted by sixteenth century humanists.<sup>1</sup> However, although he did not hesitate to indulge in abstract theorizing about the general nature of political obligation, Buchanan persistently attempted to locate and anchor his ideas in the specific context provided by Scotland's long and illustrious history. In other words, however universal the principles he adumbrated were, he believed that they were best practised and exemplified apud Scotos. Of no aspect of his thought is this more true than of his understanding of the law and it is to his interpretation of its nature, source and function that we must now turn our attention.

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1. To examine Buchanan's sources in detail is a task well beyond the scope of this study and, except in specific instances, I have not attempted in what follows to trace the provenance of his radical ideas. However, his debt to conciliar and other scholastic sources is explored in both Francis Oakley, 'On the Road from Constance to 1688 : The Political Thought of John Mair and George Buchanan', Journal of British Studies, I (1962), 1-31, and Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge, 1978), ii, 338-45.

## II

We have already encountered Buchanan arguing that the Stoic King will almost certainly remain an ideal, that the people will have perforce to choose a ruler who only approximates to it, and that the latter must, therefore, be subjected to the law. But where, the De Jure Regni now goes on to ask, does the power to promulgate such law reside? To Buchanan, it is self-evident that the person whose appetites the law is designed to curb cannot be permitted to control the processes by which it is established and administered. Consequently, he immediately proceeds to divest the ruler of almost all judicial and legislative powers.<sup>1</sup> The administration of the law is to be left entirely in the hands of lawyers and judges; the king is to take no decisions as regards future contingencies without the advice and consent of his council; and the actual creation of law is to be the preserve of the people, or rather, 'as is roughly our custom, selected men from all estates (ordines) should meet with the king in council' and whatever they decide should thereafter 'be submitted to the judgment of the people (id ad populi iudicium deferretur)'.<sup>2</sup> To Maitland's inevitable objection that this is to multiply enormously the chances of the law being framed according to men's passions, Buchanan replies with the Aristotelian argument that a multitude of men 'in all things judges better than individuals; for individuals have certain portions of virtues which mingled together create a single pre-eminent virtue'.<sup>3</sup> The virtue and rationality of the council thus assured, the laws framed, as Buchanan tells us at a later stage in the Dialogue, 'should

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 31f.

2. Ibid., 32.

3. Ibid., 33.



be nothing other than the express image (in so far as we can attain it) of a good prince'.<sup>1</sup>

It is as well to pause at this point to consider what we are to understand by Buchanan's rather cryptic remark that the law ought to be submitted to the people's judgment. For this has been construed both as a device akin to the modern referendum and as an indication that Buchanan believed the people should have 'a more continuous sovereign control than Locke was to accord them in the Second Treatise'.<sup>2</sup> Such interpretations, however, are neither convincing nor even likely if the phrase 'as is roughly our custom (prope ad consuetudinem nostram)' is taken with any seriousness. For if Buchanan is referring to Scottish custom - as he surely is - the passage as a whole seems rather to refer to the practice of selecting the Committee of the Articles from the estates assembled in parliament and to its role in formulating legislation in closed session with the king which was then submitted en bloc to the parliament - not the people as a whole - for ratification.<sup>3</sup> That this procedure (or something very similar to it) is what Buchanan meant by 'the judgment of the people' is perhaps further suggested by the remarks which immediately precede the quoted passage. For there Maitland protests that by giving law-making powers to the people (populus), Buchanan is handing over legislative authority to 'a monster with many heads'; to which Buchanan replies: 'I never thought that the matter should be left to the judgment of the whole

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1. Ibid., 68.

2. For these interpretations, see Burns, 'Political Ideas of George Buchanan', 64.

3. On the function of the Committee of the Articles, see R. S. Rait, The Parliaments of Scotland (Glasgow, 1924), 362-79.

people (universus populus) ...'.<sup>1</sup> Buchanan's language is often inexact, and his application of the vocabulary of classical republicanism to sixteenth century Scotland often misleading, but there is no reason to attribute to him a political theory which was radically populist in character. Like Mair before him, Buchanan's distrust of the imperita multitudo and his preference for some form of aristocratic constitutionalism is apparent in both the Dialogue and the History. To make this clear, however, we must look now at the grounds on which Buchanan believed kings might be held to account and to whom he assigned the task of restraining and deposing a tyrannical ruler.

From the outset of the Dialogue, Buchanan has steadfastly maintained that kingship is elective and that its sole purpose is the good of the people. As he firmly tells Maitland: 'in this whole discussion nothing else has been sought but that the Ciceronian maxim, "the welfare of the people should be the supreme law", might be held sacred and inviolable'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as we have seen, in order to ensure that the ruler fulfils this obligation, the people set up laws to guide and restrain him. It follows, therefore, not only that the law is superior to the king, but that the people - the source of law - are superior to both.<sup>3</sup> There is, in fact, as Buchanan states near the end of the Dialogue, 'a mutual pact (mutua pactio) between the king and his subjects' based on the ruler's obligation to abide by the law. Consequently, if he should spurn the law, he also breaks the contract and may legitimately be held to account by his natural superiors, the

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 32.

2. Ibid., 34; cf. Cicero, De Legibus, III, iii, 8.

3. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 85-6.



people. Furthermore, if the ruler should refuse to present himself for trial - refuse, that is, to recognize his subjection to the law - he ipso facto reveals himself a public enemy and, 'once a just war is undertaken against an enemy, it is right not only for the whole people, but even for individuals (etiam singulis) to destroy that enemy'.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, in the case of a ruler who is condemned (or stands self-condemned) as acting outwith the law, the Dialogue unequivocally endorses the legitimacy of single-handed tyrannicide. Buchanan, however, was not prepared to leave it even at that. On the contrary, he proceeded further to argue that any individual who considered the prince to have acted tyrannically had a perfect right to kill him without reference to any legal or constitutional standard or procedure whatsoever.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, in Buchanan's view, a subject was at liberty to act against the prince according to the dictates of his individual conscience (or whim) and regardless of the collective will of the political community to which he belonged. Precisely why Buchanan should have sought to legitimate such a dangerously subversive argument is extremely hard to fathom.<sup>3</sup> For not only is it frighteningly anarchic in its implications - it would, as Maitland in fact

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1. Ibid., 96-7.

2. Ibid., 99-100.

3. Quentin Skinner (Foundations of Modern Political Thought, ii, 340-1, 343-4) has argued that it is a logical extension of his anti-Aristotelian view of pre-political society. Yet Skinner's own interpretation of Buchanan's account of the creation of political societies - that they 'are not directly ordained by God, but arise naturally out of a series of decisions made by men themselves' - seems at odds with Buchanan's fundamentally Aristotelian view that it was a natural impulse (vis naturae) - a divine or natural law - which first brought men together and that it was neither orators nor lawyers who were the authors of human society but God Himself.

complains, 'permit license to the wicked and loose complete disorder on us all',<sup>1</sup> - but it is also a quite unnecessary addition to (and negation of) the institutional checks on tyrannical rule which Buchanan believed ought to exist in any well-ordered community. Admittedly, as we shall see, the Dialogue is not terribly clear on the nature of these checks. Nevertheless, the work was undoubtedly written in the belief that, at least in Scotland, there existed a constitutional mechanism which effectively rendered his extraordinarily individualistic interpretation of tyrannicide redundant. Leaving the latter aside, therefore, it is important now to examine this mechanism in more detail and to ask both who precisely the 'people' were who might call an erring ruler to account and through what institutional structure they were normally obliged to act.

We have already noted Buchanan's imprecise attribution of legislative authority to the 'people' and his redefinition of this in terms of a council selected from the estates. Unfortunately, the ambiguities of that passage are accentuated rather than clarified when he comes to consider those who may enforce the law and call an erring ruler to account. Once more he states that such power is vested in the people, but once more the statement is immediately qualified, this time by Maitland: 'Indeed, in the whole people (universus populus) or in its greater part (maior pars). I grant you still further that it is in those in whom the people or the greater part of the people (maior pars populi) has vested that power'.<sup>2</sup> On the face of it, this would seem akin to a theory in which sovereignty, ultimately residing in the

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 99.

2. Ibid., 88.



people as a whole, is vested in those to whom the majority of the people voluntarily transfer it - a body, for example, such as the estates. Unfortunately, however, Buchanan does not elaborate on the matter and considerable doubt must be cast on any 'democratic' or 'representative' interpretation of the passage. What, for example, are we to understand by maior pars? It seems highly unlikely that Buchanan ever entertained any notion of a numerical majority of the whole people and it has been argued that he employed the phrase, as did Mair and other medieval thinkers, to indicate 'a quantitative-qualitative superiority'.<sup>1</sup> Such an interpretation is lent credence by Buchanan's subsequent remark that 'if subjects are reckoned not by number (e numero), but by worth (dignitate), not only the better part (melior pars) but even the greater (maior) will stand for liberty, honour and security'.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, this is still by no means crystal clear, but it does seem to suggest that Buchanan, far from anticipating modern democratic procedure, was simply employing a variant of the medieval formula of the valentior or maior et sanior pars.<sup>3</sup> That said, however, there still remains the question of to whom this indeterminate maior pars populi actually transfers its authority. Once again Buchanan gives no satisfactory answer and one is obliged to piece together his meaning from scattered references throughout the text. It might be

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1. Oakley, 'From Constance to 1688', 26; see also above, p.141, note 2.

2. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 90.

3. The formula (ultimately of Aristotelian origin) was particularly associated with Marsilius of Padua and was later employed by conciliarists including John Mair. On Marsilius' use of it, see Michael Wilks, The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1963), 108-9, 194-6. On Mair, see J. H. Burns, 'Politia Regalis et Optima : The Political Ideas of John Mair', History of Political Thought, II (1981-2), 31-61, esp. 58-9.

expected that such authority would be vested in the estates assembled in parliament and Buchanan's statements that 'all the estates ... in public assembly' sanctioned the slaying of James III and that the murderers of King Cullen were punished by a sentence imposed by the estates, might suggest that this is indeed the case.<sup>1</sup> But, apart from the aforementioned reference to a council being selected from the estates, these are in fact the only occasions on which such a body is mentioned in the Dialogue. Moreover, on the same page as he comments on Cullen's murder, Buchanan remarks simply that it was 'the nobility' who punished the assassins of James I. Clearly, at least in the Dialogue, no sure indication is given either of those in whom the maior pars invest their authority or of the institutional structure through which they exercise their powers. In fact, the most serious candidate seems to be the council, a body which we have seen to be responsible for formulating the law and which Buchanan also tells us a good king voluntarily calls together to deliberate with him.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the Dialogue's general opacity, however, Buchanan's oblique references to the Scottish estates do suggest that on the wider canvas of the History a more sharply focused picture of this institution as the one to which the ruler is accountable might materialize. Yet, at best, this expectation is but partially fulfilled. Although there are many references to the estates and several also to parliament in the History, these are far outnumbered by, and in terms of constitutional function impossible to distinguish from, the assemblies, conventions and councils which litter its pages. Furthermore, the

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 81, 61.

2. Ibid., 20.



composition of these bodies is nowhere described in any detail - more often than not Buchanan refers simply to the nobility. In fact, if the History makes clear Buchanan's firm conviction in the accountability of kings, it reveals with equal clarity that he had no conception of a single pre-eminent institution to which they were obliged to account for themselves and their actions. Nor, indeed, is such imprecision entirely surprising. After all, perhaps because taxation was not yet a regular instrument of government in Scotland, the functions of the sixteenth century Scottish parliament remained extremely ill-defined and could be performed equally well by the smaller and more manageable privy council. Moreover, both of these bodies as well as the conventions - 'mini-parliaments' which could be called less formally and thus more rapidly than the full parliament - were dominated by the nobility. They can, in fact, perhaps best be described as so many more or less exclusive councils of the realm through which the king sought the nobility's approval of his policies.<sup>1</sup> In the light of this, it is hardly surprising that Buchanan should have blurred the institutional edges of the Scottish polity and viewed the nobility themselves, rather than the ill-defined institutions which they dominated, as the body to whom the king was accountable. After all, if his political thought is articulated in the vocabulary of classical republicanism, in many respects it remains nevertheless little more than a

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1. This is not meant to deny the pre-eminence of parliament or to lessen its significance. My point is simply that Scotland's institutional structure was under-developed and extremely fluid in comparison with other contemporary western European kingdoms. For some useful comments on parliament's role, see Jenny Wormald, Court, Kirk and Community : Scotland 1470-1625 (London, 1981), 20-2.

rationalization of the under-developed political culture of sixteenth century Scotland.

It would be tedious to recite the litan̄y of those early Scottish kings who, according to Buchanan's reinterpretation of Boece, were deposed for their egregious tyranny. Suffice it to say that almost without exception it is the nobility, either in a council, an assembly, a public convention or a parliament, to whom the tyrant is obliged to account for his crimes.<sup>1</sup> This must not, however, be construed as a charter for aristocratic anarchy. Buchanan held as exalted a view of nobility as he did of royalty and, indeed, the virtues he looked for in a nobleman were identical to those he looked for in a king. He was, therefore, highly critical of factious and self-seeking magnates who, enslaved - like a tyrant - by their passions, acted only in their own interests and without regard to the commonweal of the realm.<sup>2</sup> The nobility were, after all, the king's natural counsellors, responsible not only for advising him but for maintaining him in the paths of virtue and the law. Thus, faced with the vicious tyranny of Cullen, it was 'the uncorrupted part of the nobility' who 'called a public convention ... at which the king was ordered to attend that, along with the nobles, he might consult ... respecting the public safety'.<sup>3</sup>

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1. For some examples, see Buchanan, History, i, 157, 184, 200-1, 252, 259, 277, 280.

2. See, for example, his condemnation of the great but self-seeking magnate William, earl of Douglas, who was corrupted by flattery - 'the continual plague of great families' - and met a deservedly bloody end at the 'Black Dinner' (ibid., ii, 116, 123ff). Buchanan frequently judged the nobility in terms reminiscent of the conventional distinction between the pursuit of 'singular profit' and allegiance to the 'commonweal' and clearly disliked any show of factious opposition (see, for example, ibid., ii, 127-30, 176-83, 188-9, 254-5, 314, 332, 345-6, 416-9, 427-8, 524-5).

3. Ibid., i, 297-8.



To the Rex Stoicus of the Dialogue must be added the nobilitas stoica of the History. Consequently, Buchanan was deeply concerned that noblemen should receive the same kind of education which he deemed essential to a king if he was adequately to perform his public functions. Not surprisingly, therefore, he adopted a typically humanist attitude to the question of vera nobilitas and advocated the importance of cerebral as well as chivalric accomplishments as a means of promoting virtue. For example, just as he praised James I's own learning, so he commended the same king's efforts 'to eradicate from the minds of his nobility the false idea that literature rendered men idle, slothful and averse to active employment'. In the same way as Mair, Buchanan totally disagreed with those who argued that learning 'softened the military spirit and broke and debilitated every generous impulse'.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, he saw the training of the mind as essential to every worthwhile human activity, for only thus could men acquire the self-discipline necessary to subject their base passions to the rule of reason.<sup>2</sup> With the nobility as much as with the king, Buchanan understood reason not only to be the essence of individual virtue, but also the sole guarantor of 'temperance' or 'justice' in the realm. While, therefore, his conception of Scottish politics assigned

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1. For these comments, see *ibid.*, ii, 96. On the debate over the nature of 'true nobility' and Mair's contribution to it, see above, pp.43ff.

2. At one point in the History (i, 298-9), Buchanan remarked that there is a 'twofold principle of nature' in man, one of the body and one of the mind. As the development of the body, he continued, outstrips that of the mind, so 'laws are appointed to restrain the exuberant impetuosity of youth, till, by care and cultivation, reason acquires strength sufficient to regulate the natural desires of the body'. Presumably, this would apply to the nobility as much as Buchanan thought it applied to kings.

considerable power to the aristocracy, it was power strictly tempered by his deep-rooted belief in the nobility's public responsibilities and by the high standards of personal conduct to which he expected them to adhere.

In the light of this, it is worth pausing here briefly to examine Buchanan's account of the exemplary role of the nobility in opposing and ultimately deposing James III.<sup>1</sup> We have already seen that the reign of this unpopular monarch was perceived by many sixteenth century Scots as paradigmatic of the breakdown of the ideal political order. According to the myth which rapidly developed around him, James was a vicious tyrant who, corrupted by low-born favourites, ignored justice and the commonweal and met an ignominious end on the battlefield of Sauchieburn in 1488.<sup>2</sup> Such a legend, although hitherto it had contained no hint that the king was deliberately deposed, was tailor-made to suit Buchanan's purposes and he did not hesitate either to embroider it still further with matter of his own invention or to endow the outcome with explicit constitutional significance. Thus he portrayed James as an 'insatiable tyrant' who, unwilling to endure contradiction, ignored the sound advice of his virtuous nobles and surrounded himself instead with obsequious time-servers - Thomas Preston, Robert (sic) Cochrane and William Rogers - 'men of the lowest rank' who despised the nobility and encouraged the king to encompass their destruction. Thus far Buchanan's account of the reign conforms to the established pattern and is no more than an especially graphic description of a king's degeneration into tyranny. At this point, however, Buchanan shifts the

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1. For what follows, see *ibid.*, ii, 195-221.

2. On the myth and its development, see above, pp.65-6, 97-9.



focus and, instead of concentrating solely on the vices of the king, goes on also to highlight the virtues of the nobility. Thus he attributes to the earl of Angus a speech in which the legitimate grievances of the king's natural counsellors are most sympathetically expressed and then describes how the nobility (with admirable restraint) held back those firebrands who sought to 'violate the person of the king' himself and proceeded rather to 'seize the obnoxious minions who exercised the government' and to hang them for their crimes against the commonweal. James, however, refused to heed the lesson which the nobility had attempted to impress upon him and, slipping back into his old ways, returned the government into the hands of 'upstarts' and devoted himself 'wholly to his pleasures'. Consequently, according to Buchanan, the upright and incorruptible nobility 'who formerly had desired his reformation and not his ruin, despairing now of any reconciliation, turned all their endeavours to his destruction'. Adopting the king's son as their captain, they raised a rebellion against James and defeated and killed him in battle. Thereafter, in order to confirm the legitimacy of their actions, 'in the next convention of the estates, it was voted that he was justly slain and an act passed to prevent all who had borne arms against him from being ever personally or in their posterity disturbed on that account'.<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that this version of the events of the 1480's is extremely tendentious. Much more important in the present context, however, is the fact that Buchanan retailed and embroidered

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1. Buchanan, History, ii, 221; cf. ibid., ii, 208, where Buchanan implies that the punishment meted out to the king's favourites in 1482 was 'according to law'.

a myth which had for many years served to explain and legitimate the Scots' most deep-rooted assumptions regarding the nature and function of kingship. Yet at the same time he radically altered the political perspective and implications of the legend not only by concentrating on the virtues of the nobility rather than the vices of the king, but by underwriting the rebels' actions with the sanction of the law. In effect, as far as Buchanan was concerned, the nobility had simply attempted to ensure - as, he believed, their ancestors had done many times before - that the king governed according to the law. So far, however, Buchanan's conception of this law has proved decidedly elusive. It has been noted only that he identified it with reason and nature, that he perceived the perfect prince as its embodiment, and that, in the absence of such a paragon, the less prudent ruler should be subjected to laws formulated in the image of Rex Stoicus. In the Dialogue, however, the latter positive laws are never actually specified and the legal framework of the state remains an indeterminate abstraction. In fact, the closest Buchanan approaches to a definition is in response to Maitland's rather damaging assertion that his whole theory is irrelevant because in Scotland kings are 'not elected, but hereditary' and, therefore, their authority is not limited, but absolute.<sup>1</sup> To this Buchanan responds with an historical argument based once again on Boece's Scotorum Historiae. Drawing on the latter's account of Scotland's early history, Buchanan contends that, from the foundation of the kingdom until the reign of Kenneth III, the monarchy was clearly elective and the kings often held to account by their subjects.<sup>2</sup> Kenneth, however, as Buchanan grudgingly admits, established

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1. Buchanan, De Jure Regni, 58.

2. Ibid., 60-1.



the succession hereditarily in his own family. But, he argues, he could only have done so with the consent of the people and with the proviso that royal power should thenceforward be limited. These limitations, he contends, are implicit in the coronation oath by which the king swears to uphold the laws and customs of the realm. Consequently, he is clearly not absolute, but subject to the conditions laid down in the oath which he takes before assuming the reins of power.<sup>1</sup>

In modified form these arguments are repeated in Buchanan's own History, but he was quite unable to document them in the manner employed, for example, by Francois Hotman in his Francogallia of 1573. Buchanan was unable to range against the claims of absolutism a series of statutes or legal decisions demonstrating the limited nature of the Scottish monarchy or even guaranteeing the rights of Scottish subjects. Indeed, the only positive enactment on which his theory is founded is the coronation oath - and even that escapes detailed comment in the History. Patently, his conception of the legal framework of the state was neither rooted in nor guaranteed by written law.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, he was appealing essentially to divine or natural laws which he believed were embodied and exemplified in the standard (albeit subtly modified) account of Scotland's past history. Thus, in deposing

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1. Ibid., 61-6.

2. Perhaps this is not surprising, for as Buchanan himself wrote: 'in Scotland ... there are almost no laws except acts of parliament, and these in general not fixed, but temporary' (History, ii, 306; cf. ibid., ii, 502). There was, in fact, little serious analysis of Scots law until the end of the sixteenth century when the writings of Sir Thomas Craig and Sir John Skene began to appear.

James III, the nobility had adhered to a pattern of virtuous political conduct which their ancestors had also followed in overthrowing not only Durstus but a whole host of tyrants whose licentious behaviour negated reason and the law and threatened justice and the commonweal. It followed, therefore, that in deposing Mary Stewart, the Confederate Lords had done no more than to uphold and enforce the principles of natural law which had defined and limited the authority of the Scottish monarchy since its very inception. Thus, towards the end of the History, in Buchanan's account of the speech delivered by the earl of Morton to the English court in 1571, the opponents of Mary's deposition are upbraided because they 'do not reflect upon what they owe to the examples of their forefathers and forget those eternal laws, which have been held sacred since the foundation of the monarchy, and enforced by the illustrious nobles, who set bounds to the despotism of the crown'.<sup>1</sup> It was clearly these 'eternal laws' which, in Buchanan's view, regulated the functioning of the Scottish polity and in accordance with which the Confederate Lords had acted in deposing Mary in 1567.

Morton's speech as recounted by Buchanan (essentially a literary version of the 'wryting' of 1571) is worthy of closer scrutiny both as a final summing-up of Buchanan's political philosophy and because it contains his most explicit statement of his conception of natural law.<sup>2</sup> The speech begins by denying that Mary's deposition was 'a novel, cruel

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1. Ibid., ii, 603-4.

2. For what follows, see *ibid.*, ii, 601-7. On the close relationship between this speech and the 'wryting' of 1571, see Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', esp. 7ff.



and violent measure' and by asserting that 'the ancient practice of our ancestors in punishing their kings proves that there was nothing new in the fact'. It then proceeds to recapitulate the arguments of the De Jure Regni:

For the Scottish nation, originally a free people, created themselves kings upon this condition : that the government, being entrusted to them by the suffrages of the people, if the state of the country required it, could be taken from them by the same suffrages; ... the ceremonies used at the inauguration of our kings, have an express reference to this law; from all which, it is evident that government is nothing more than a mutual compact between the people and their kings.

This 'ancient law' (as Morton terms it) has remained unchanged since the foundation of the kingdom and, despite the many kings 'whom our fathers have dethroned, banished, imprisoned and also put to death', it has never been considered too severe. Nor, indeed, is it a law which demands positive enactment:

... for it is not one of those laws which are obnoxious to the change of times, but is one of those statutes which, in the primary constitution of our nature, are stamped upon the heart, are verified by the mutual consent of almost every people, and, like the universe itself, must remain unbroken and eternal. They acknowledge no power, but all are governed and regulated by them. This principle which, in spite of us, dwells in our bosoms, always influenced our ancestors, armed them against oppression and taught them to repress the insolence of tyrants.

We have come full circle and are back to the 'light divinely infused in our minds' with which Buchanan begins the Dialogue. Tyrannous rule is a negation of nature, reason and the law, a defiance of the divine will, and as such its destruction is in accordance with the laws of God and of nature implanted in all men. Nor is there any doubt that Mary

is a tyrant on a par with James III or any other monarch whom the Scots had legitimately deposed. After all, as Buchanan had amply 'documented' in an earlier part of the History, Mary's lascivious desires and licentious court, her neglect of the nobility and promotion of upstart counsellors, her partial justice and defiance of the law, and finally her adulterous affair with Bothwell and despicable murder of Darnley, all 'undisguisedly showed her tyrannical disposition'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, according to Buchanan, Mary displayed in her own person every vice and wicked proclivity conventionally associated with tyrannical rule. In her reign were re-enacted all the sins and misdeeds characteristic of her miscreant forbears, of James III and Durstus, of Evenus and Ferquaird, of Donald V and Ethus. She was, in short, the epitome of a tyrant and, as such, the Scots were perfectly justified in emulating their virtuous forefathers and enforcing the law which Mary herself had so consistently spurned. As Morton himself concluded, the conduct of the Confederate Lords was quite clearly 'agreeable to the divine law, the law of nature, which is itself divine, and to the laws and institutions of our country'.<sup>2</sup>

### III

However ill-defined and elusive Buchanan's understanding of the law may be, it was clearly crucial to the radicalization of his otherwise fairly conventional view of the political world. At the core of

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1. For this and what follows, see Books XVII and XVIII of Buchanan's History which were skilfully designed to demonstrate Mary's inexorable slide into tyranny in a manner which deliberately and effectively evokes the conventional conception of a vicious monarch whose behaviour threatens the commonweal and liberty of the realm.
  2. Buchanan, History, ii, 607.



Buchanan's thinking, for example, lies a preoccupation with the relationship between kingship, justice and the commonweal which we know to have dominated a great deal of sixteenth century Scottish political thought. Moreover, Buchanan's essentially ethical vocabulary of kingship, despite its redefinition along more thoroughly classical lines, clearly embodies assumptions and expectations regarding the function of kingship which are identical to those articulated in the commonweal language habitually employed by the majority of his Scottish contemporaries. Indeed, in this respect, Buchanan merely added a typically humanist gloss to a traditional (and basically medieval) mode of political discourse. At the same time, however, by means of an appeal to natural law, Buchanan grafted on to the highly conservative ideology expressed in the language of the commonweal a revolutionary dimension founded on radical scholastic notions regarding the source and limits of political authority. In other words, while he fully endorsed the conventional concept of an ideal prince, Buchanan elevated to the status of natural laws much less conventional views relating to the 'popular' origins of sovereign power and the consequent accountability of kings to their subjects. Such ideas were not, of course, wholly unknown to the Scots : Buchanan's own erstwhile teacher, John Mair, had long since ensured that they had at least academic currency, while Willock, Craig and Sempill had all aired similarly radical ideas in the course of the 1560's. In a sense, indeed, in purely Scottish terms, the real interest and novelty of Buchanan's works lie not in their radicalism per se, but in the manner in which that radicalism was made to interlock with the fundamentally conservative political ideology subscribed to by the majority of his compatriots. In this respect, moreover, the humanist's debt to Mair was far outweighed by what he

owed to Hector Boece. For it was through his reinterpretation of the Scotorum Historiae that Buchanan's 'natural laws' of election and tyrannicide were not only lent historical legitimacy, but were also, and equally significantly, integrated with a national epos - an historical myth - which had exerted a powerful influence over the Scottish political community since at least the fourteenth century. There is, as we have seen, rather more to Boece's chronicle than what H. R. Trevor-Roper has unhelpfully (and inaccurately) dismissed as the 'vertiginous alternations of election, fornication and deposition'.<sup>1</sup> Crude and extravagant it undoubtedly is, but woven into the fabric of the Scotorum Historiae (and providing it with some thematic unity) is a firm conviction that the freedom of the Scottish realm hangs ultimately on the willingness of the Scots - and particularly of their kings - to emulate and enforce the strict moral discipline practised by their ancient forbears. Not unexpectedly, the same theme lies also at the heart of Buchanan's Rerum Scoticarum Historia. As we shall see, however, in making the transition from Boece to Buchanan, the ancient discipline did not remain unchanged. In the process, it assumed political connotations with implications not only for the status of the realm but also for its governance.

It is just conceivable that Buchanan may actually have met Boece when the latter journeyed to Paris in 1526 to see his chronicle through the press.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not such an encounter initially stimulated Buchanan's interest in history, there is no doubt that long before the 1560's he was seriously contemplating a revision of Boece's work which,

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1. Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', 27.

2. See McFarlane, Buchanan, 26.



without substantially altering the narrative framework or patriotic bias of the Scottish chronicle tradition, would have stripped it of the superstitious accretions of the credulous and presented the story of his native land in a form more in keeping with the classicized sensibilities of his fellow humanists. How much (if any) of this original project had actually reached paper before Buchanan was overtaken by the events of 1567 is not known. It does seem likely, however, that his views on the legendary origins of the Scots and on the chronological development of the Scottish kingdom long predated Mary's deposition and remained materially unaffected by the ideological conflicts to which it gave rise.<sup>1</sup> His views on these subjects are, in fact, precisely those one would expect to find in a patriotic humanist whose interests were not primarily historical but rather rhetorical and philological. Thus he rejected as wholly fanciful the legend of Gathelus and Scota and their Mediterranean odyssey and argued rather that the Scots were the descendants of a branch of a people of ancient Gaul who had colonized first northern Iberia and then Ireland before finally infiltrating the north-western seaboard of the British mainland. This broadly accurate contention Buchanan based on a highly sophisticated linguistic analysis aimed (for reasons to which we will return) at proving that the Britons and Picts were also derived of Gaulish stock and spoke a common Gallic language of which Irish, Welsh and Scottish Gaelic were all derivatives.<sup>2</sup> However, if this critique of the Scots' origins shows marked originality, Buchanan's account of

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1. For comments on Buchanan's interest in history in the years before 1560 and the form such an interest was likely to take, see *ibid.*, 416-8, and Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', 17-22.

2. See Buchanan, *History*, i, 76ff.

their subsequent history adheres to the pattern established by the medieval chroniclers and rehearsed by Hector Boece. As regards chronology, for example, Buchanan simply followed tradition in maintaining that the kingdom was initially founded by Fergus I in 330 B.C.; that it was briefly overthrown in the late fourth century A.D. by an alliance of Picts and Romans; that it was re-established in 403 by Fergus II; and that it had remained free and unconquered ever since that date.<sup>1</sup> As this suggests, moreover, in adopting his predecessors' chronology, Buchanan also adopted their patriotic bias. Although, for example, he was unable fully to credit Boece's rousing account of the Scots' heroic conflict with the might of the Roman empire, he was clearly no less proud of the antiquity of the kingdom and the Scots' persistent efforts to maintain the freedom of their realm. Thus, although the medieval vocabulary of freedom is not an obtrusive element in Buchanan's work, he could still speak approvingly (and not infrequently) of the Scots fighting 'not for glory, empire or plunder, but for their country, life, and whatever is dear to man'.<sup>2</sup> Buchanan's patriotism is, however, a matter to which we will return in a moment and view from a rather different perspective. It is sufficient here to suggest that, although more sceptical and more restrained, his History conforms nevertheless to the narrative structure pioneered by the medieval chroniclers and developed most fully in Boece's Scotorum Historiae.

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1. Ibid., i, 158, 205f, 213-4, and passim.

2. Ibid., i, 203 (cf. i, 178). This aspect of Buchanan's thinking is particularly apparent in his account of the careers of Wallace and Bruce (see, for example, ibid., i, 406-7, 414, 422).



In the light of this, it is perhaps hardly surprising that in reworking the national epos Buchanan should have retained as the organizing principle of his narrative Boece's account of the Scots' constant endeavour to emulate and maintain the temperate manners of their forbears. Like Boece, indeed, Buchanan clearly believed that Scotland was essentially a polity of manners and that both the safety and stability of the realm were ultimately dependent on the maintenance of the Spartan discipline practised by the Scots from the very earliest times. Significantly, moreover, such a theme (strongly reminiscent of Livy's account of the decline of Rome) dovetailed neatly with Buchanan's theory of the passions and his neo-Stoic belief that the essence of virtue lay in the suppression of man's sensual instincts and an austere temperate life-style based on the rule of reason.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, throughout the History, Buchanan lost few opportunities to warn against the debilitating influence of luxury and self-indulgence and to recommend the simple way of life practised by the ancient Scots. Like Boece, in fact, it was in precisely these terms that Buchanan construed historical change and characterized even such processes as the introduction of feudalism into Scotland. Commenting, for example, on Malcolm Canmore's reign, he wrote:

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1. Livy was in fact one of Buchanan's favourite authors and it is not without interest that a recent commentator has argued that the dynamic of the Roman's history 'is above all attributable to the Stoic ethical influence' and that he 'looks at the past as a battlefield of manners, and seeks to illustrate the moral qualities needed for a state to thrive' (see P. G. Walsh, Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods [Cambridge, 1961], 4, 66, and passim). Needless to say, such a description is equally applicable to Buchanan's work.

Luxury, however, even then diffused itself so extensively over the whole kingdom, not only by means of foreign commerce with the English and other nations, but likewise by the numerous exiles who were received and settled throughout the country, that all his [i.e., the king's] attempts to prevent its increase were nearly in vain. The chief difficulty lay with the nobility whom he endeavoured to bring back to their ancient simplicity of manners, for they having once yielded to the allurements of pleasure, not only grew worse by indulgence, but allowed themselves to be precipitated into the vortex of debauchery, while they endeavoured to disguise the most infamous vices under the names of gallantry and generosity.<sup>1</sup>

As this suggests (and as one would expect), the key factor in the maintenance of Scottish virtue was the behaviour of the prince himself. Thus, time and again in the History, we find Buchanan describing kings such as Kenneth III who, well aware that 'the inclinations of the people are almost always influenced by those of the prince', reformed his own household and court in order to set an example to his subjects and 'gradually bring them back to the ancient discipline'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Buchanan's view of the Scottish past was organized around what he saw as the ebb and flow of the tide of luxury and the role of the monarchy in alternately destroying and restoring the moral discipline on which depended the commonweal and liberty of the realm. In the aftermath of the vicious tyranny of Durstus, for example, his successor Evenus, 'in order to reform the manners of the people which had become corrupted under the late king, recalled the youth to the ancient simplicity in dress, food and common manners; for thus, he believed, they would

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1. Buchanan, History, i, 344. For Boece's similar interpretation of the processes of history, see above, pp.85-90.

2. Buchanan, History, i, 299.



be rendered more formidable in war and less turbulent in peace'.<sup>1</sup> Such examples could certainly be multiplied, but it will already be clear that Buchanan saw the ancient discipline as a benchmark against which the manners of all subsequent generations of Scots were to be judged. In fact, predicated on the neo-Stoic assumption that man's base passions must be subjected to the rule of reason, the ancient discipline exemplified those laws of nature and of God which Buchanan believed ought to govern every well-ordered political community.

Despite the example of their ancient forbears, however, Buchanan shared Boece's fear that luxury and avarice were corrupting beyond redemption the virtue of contemporary Scots and thereby threatening the commonweal and liberty of the realm. Indeed, in the same way as Boece, he believed that it was only in the Highlands and Islands that the ancient discipline was still practised to any significant extent.<sup>2</sup> Describing the island of Rona, for example, Buchanan suggested that its temperate inhabitants had an innate grasp of those natural laws which the corrupt majority of Scots could only learn through hard study:

... and here alone in the universe, I imagine,  
are to be found a people who know no want, among  
whom every necessity of life abounds even to

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1. Ibid., i, 168; see also ibid., i, 185, 187, 228, 232-3, 278, 343-4.

2. Buchanan's description of the Islands owes a good deal to his contemporary, the 'pious and diligent' Donald Monro, who compiled a topographical survey of the Western Isles in 1549 and later served with Buchanan in the General Assemblies of the 1560's. However, Monro's work contains none of the comments on primitive virtue and natural law which enliven Buchanan's description. Compare Buchanan, *History*, i, 38ff, with Monro's Western Isles of Scotland and Genealogies of the Clans 1549, ed. R. W. Monro (Edinburgh and London, 1961).

satiety. Unacquainted alike with luxury and avarice, they find in their ignorance of vice, that innocence and tranquillity of mind which others laboriously search for in the discipline and precepts of wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, Buchanan's admiration of the islanders was tempered by his knowledge that their virtuous manners were not adopted voluntarily but were imposed by the impoverished environment in which they were condemned to live.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he would have had the more sophisticated and corrupt Scottish Lowlanders take note of their untutored virtue and aspire to emulate the ancient discipline which they still practised. It was, in other words, to the Celtic west that Buchanan looked for inspiration and guidance.<sup>3</sup> The implications of this, however, were not simply ethical, they were also political. For, as Buchanan frequently pointed out, among the last vestiges of the ancient discipline surviving in the customs of the Highlands, was the belief that chieftains ought to be elected by their clansmen and were bound to follow the advice of a council.<sup>4</sup> According to Buchanan, that is,

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1. Buchanan, History, i, 55.

2. See, for example, his comments on Orcadian abstemiousness which 'has arisen not so much from reason or reflection, as from penury' (ibid., i, 58).

3. This did not, however, extend so far as to include the use of the Gaelic language whose extinction Buchanan would have allowed in favour of 'the softer and more harmonious tones of the Latin' in order to facilitate the transition 'from rusticity and barbarism to culture and civilisation' (ibid., i, 9). Himself probably a native Gaelic speaker, Buchanan was above all a humanist.

4. See ibid., ii, 602, and De Jure Regni, 65. The point is also made in the 'wryting' of 1571 (see Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', 42). The importance of a council in the local administration of justice is a point which Monro makes regarding the Western Isles, but he does not draw Buchanan's conclusions from his observation (see Monro's Western Isles, 56-7).



among their many other virtues, the Highlanders still adhered to the natural laws which had governed the election and succession of Scottish kings for twelve hundred years between the foundations of the realm under Fergus I and the reign of Kenneth III. Thus their chiefs did not succeed solely by virtue of primogeniture, but were chosen on merit from among the leading family of the clan. It was in precisely this way, argued Buchanan, that Scottish kings had been chosen from among the descendants of Fergus I.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, this was not simply a fundamental law of the kingdom, but was a natural law of which the ancient Scots (and their Highland descendants) had an apparently intuitive grasp. Consequently, to disregard such a law was not simply to subject the realm to the tyranny of infants and incompetents, but also to ignore the dictates of nature, reason and the divine will.

Although this attempt to historicize the law of nature was hardly essential in validating Buchanan's general theory of political obligation, it was obviously advantageous to integrate his radical ideas with an interpretation of the Scottish past to which the majority of his compatriots unhesitatingly subscribed. For in this way, the natural laws of election and tyrannicide became part-and-parcel of a patriotic myth which few Scots would have wished to challenge. Indeed, in the very decade during which the bulk of Buchanan's History was written, there appeared not only a second edition of Boece's chronicle (1574), but also another history of the Scots (based on Boece's work)

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1. For Buchanan's arguments regarding the succession laws, see History, i, 159, 286, 306-12, 316, 324-6, 437, and ii, 173ff.

from the pen of Bishop John Leslie (1578).<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the national epos which had developed in the middle ages continued to provide even late sixteenth century Scots with a valid and meaningful interpretation of their past. It remained, that is to say, a significant focus of the community's patriotic feelings and aspirations. In the light of this, Buchanan's celebrated attack on the Welsh antiquary, Humphrey Lhuyd, takes on renewed importance. Trevor-Roper has rightly pointed out that the Welshman's Commentarioli Descriptionis Britannicae Fragmentum (published posthumously in 1572) was anathema to Buchanan on the grounds of its trenchant critique of Boece's mythical kings to whose fates at the hands of their subjects the humanist had attached considerable constitutional significance.<sup>2</sup> Yet what is too easily forgotten is the fact that Lhuyd's intention was not just to expose and demolish the Scots' mythical prehistory, but also to replace it with the whole panoply of that same Brut tradition which the Scottish national epos was designed expressly to counter. Buchanan had, therefore, a twofold reason for his vitriolic treatment of the Welshman: not only was he keen to rescue the precedents for deposition which underwrote his political theory, but he was also eager to explode once

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1. Boece's work was reprinted with a continuation by Ferrerio (Paris, 1574). Leslie's De Origine, Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum (Rome, 1578) was also translated into the vernacular by James Dalrymple in 1596, but this was not published until the nineteenth century. Despite his Marian sympathies, Leslie simply repeated in abridged form Boece's account of the ancient kings - including their unfortunate deaths. As well as these works, one might also mention David Chambers, Histoire Abregee ... (Paris, 1579), which again repeats much of the familiar material.
  2. See Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution', 25ff. Lhuyd's work was immediately translated into English by Thomas Twyne and published as The Breviary of Britayne (London, 1573).



and for all an historiographical tradition which had for centuries been used to deny the autonomous sovereignty of the Scottish realm.

Accordingly, just as Buchanan dismissed the Scottish legend of Gathelus and Scota, so he took still greater pleasure in ridiculing the fable of Brutus and his sons invented by 'the monk', Geoffrey of Monmouth, and shamelessly propagated by the likes of Humphrey Lhuyd.<sup>1</sup> It was to expose the 'enormous falsehoods' of these 'forgers' that Buchanan brought his philological expertise to bear and argued that, despite the poetic flights of fancy of their patriotic chroniclers, the Britons, Scots and Picts had much more prosaic origins among the tribes of ancient Gaul. In the face of this expert analysis, the Brut tradition with all its imperial pretensions and implications was finally and effectively exploded. Understandably enough, however, Buchanan was by no means so hard on the Scottish historiographical tradition as he was on the English and proved as reluctant as Lhuyd was ready to criticize the date which Scottish chroniclers assigned to the first foundation of their realm. Although he did not deny that the Britons were the first to colonize Europe's offshore islands, Buchanan was more than a little piqued at Lhuyd's suggestion that the initial seven centuries of Scottish history were a mere fabrication and that 'the Scots and Picts came only lately into Scotland'.<sup>2</sup> To the contrary, Buchanan insisted that the three had in fact arrived in Britain within a short time of one another and that there was in consequence no more reason to doubt the antiquity of the Scottish kingdom than there was

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1. See Buchanan, History, i, 69ff.

2. Ibid., i, 116.

to credit the Britons' vaunted primacy over the whole island. Furthermore, Buchanan went on to argue that the latter claim was based on the unwarranted assumption (made by the majority of English chroniclers) that the area referred to as Britain in early sources designated the whole island rather than simply the Roman province south of Hadrian's wall.<sup>1</sup> It was presumably with this in mind that Buchanan (in common with his Scottish predecessors) chose to ignore English accounts of Arthur's 'British' empire and considered Geoffrey of Monmouth's description of his heroic exploits to bear 'not a shadow of resemblance to truth'.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Buchanan shared the general Scottish hostility to the idea of England's feudal superiority over the northern realm, carefully documenting William the Lion's release from any obligations contracted by the Treaty of Falaise in 1174 and subsequently dwelling on the deceitful arrogance of Edward I.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, although Buchanan's political ideas doubtless added an acerbic edge to his defence of the Scottish chronicle tradition, it was a defence founded also on a desire to vindicate the antiquity and autonomy of his native realm in the face of a revival of the Brut legend. In this respect, Buchanan was not simply a radical political ideologue, but also a convinced Scottish patriot.

Nevertheless, despite his vigorous endorsement of the Scottish national epos, it would be wrong to portray Buchanan as an unrepentant

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1. See *ibid.*, i, 12-3, 121-2, 288. Buchanan occasionally follows Fordun and Boece in using 'Albion' to denote the whole island (see above, pp.119-20), but more usually he bows to common usage and refers to Britain.

2. Buchanan, *History*, i, 238-44.

3. See *ibid.*, i, 365f, 391ff.



Anglophobe. The tutor of a potential British king and the supporter of an Anglophile Scottish government, Buchanan was prepared to look favourably upon the idea of union with England.<sup>1</sup> Yet his advocacy of amity with the old enemy contained none of the apocalyptic urgency displayed by Henrysone and Somerset and clearly did not entail a denial of Scottish sovereignty. Like Mair or Lindsay, if Buchanan envisaged union, it was one of equals which would have involved an explicit recognition of Scotland's original autonomy. This was a view which was to be upheld later in the century by no less a unionist than Sir Thomas Craig who, for all his sophisticated historical inquiries, was as reluctant as any contemporary Scot to abandon the long line of mythical kings which symbolized Scottish freedom. In this respect, however, Buchanan's reinterpretation of Scotland's early history posed serious problems. For by integrating his radical principles with the national epos, the humanist made it extremely difficult for conservative royalists such as Craig to disentangle the beloved royal line from the abhorrent revolutionary doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Buchanan, indeed, continued to haunt the royalist conscience in this way throughout the seventeenth century. Sir George Mackenzie, for example, while excoriating the poisonous arguments of the De Jure Regni, rushed nevertheless

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1. See, for example, *ibid.*, i, 387, and ii, 284-7. More generally, see his account of the Rough Wooing which is markedly favourable to the Anglophile cause (*ibid.*, ii, 326ff).

2. See Sir Thomas Craig, De Unione Regnorum Britanniae Tractatus, ed. and trans. C. S. Terry (S.H.S., 1909), esp. 357ff. See also his Scotland's Sovereignty Asserted ... [1602], trans. George Ridpath (London, 1695), in which Craig refuted the Brut tradition and upheld the antiquity and independence of the Scottish royal line. However, in his The Right of Succession to the Kingdom of England ... [1603], trans. James Gatherer (London, 1703), he inveighed strongly against the principle of elective monarchy.

to Buchanan's defence when an English bishop had the temerity to champion the views of Humphrey Lhuyd.<sup>1</sup> A century earlier, the Scottish parliament of 1584 apparently tried to make the same distinction for, as Arthur Williamson has pointed out, while it banned the Dialogue, the History was merely recalled for suitable revisions.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately for royalists, however, it proved impossible to 'decontaminate' the historiographical tradition and Buchanan's unexpurgated work became for the majority of Scots the definitive account of Scotland's past. Quite clearly, Buchanan's manipulation of the national epos was a highly effective means of popularizing his radical ideas. Indeed, it was not until the early eighteenth century that the Jacobite, Father Thomas Innes, resolved to cut the royalists' losses and, by finally discrediting Boece's mythical kings, discredit also Buchanan's political philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See A Defence of the Antiquity of the Royal Line of Scotland ... In Answer to the Bishop of St. Asaph [1685] and Ius Regium ... maintained against Buchanan, Naphtali, Dolman, Milton & C [1684], both reprinted in The Works of Sir George Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1716-22), ii, 355-95, 439-83.
  2. Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness, 191, note 50.
  3. See Thomas Innes, A Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain or Scotland [1729] (repr. Edinburgh, 1885). In fact, however, Innes contrived valiantly not to throw the royalist baby out with the radical bath-water, cleverly arguing that, although the Scottish kings were mythical, the Stewarts were still direct descendants of the Pictish royal line which was (of course) the most ancient dynasty not only in Britain but also in Europe.



### Conclusion

The writings of George Buchanan provide a convenient point at which to end our study of the ideological context in which the Scottish Reformation took place. For not only do they contain a classic statement of many of the political beliefs and expectations of contemporary Scots, but at the same time their self-evident radicalism introduced a novel and divisive element into the public discourse of the Scottish community at large. The material analysed in this thesis suggests that, in the century or so preceding the Reformation, Scottish political thought was dominated by an ideology of patriotic conservatism which, articulated in what we have termed the language of the commonweal, embodied fundamental assumptions regarding the status and governance of the realm. More specifically, it was an ideology based on an essentially medieval conception of kingship which stressed the supreme importance of a virtuous prince in ensuring both the freedom of the realm and the equitable administration of justice within it. It has been argued that it was in terms of this comparatively unsophisticated matrix of ideas that the majority of pre-Reformation Scots conceptualized their political environment and experiences. Moreover, analyses of the propaganda issued during both the Rough Wooing and the Wars of the Congregation have revealed the extent to which it continued to dominate Scottish political thinking even in the face of rival beliefs and ideologies. For example, it is clear that neither the apocalyptic unionism of Henrysone nor the covenanting rhetoric of Knox could override or displace the Scots' habitual commitment to the commonweal and liberty of the realm. It is equally clear, however, that the near paradigmatic connection which the Scots made between kingship and the

commonweal posed questions which they were ill-equipped or ill-disposed to answer. For not only was Scotland plagued by a long series of royal minorities, but when adult monarchs did take personal control of the realm they rarely conformed to the model of a perfect prince which governed the expectations of their subjects. It was precisely this gulf between the expectations and performance of royal government - a gulf made plainly obvious by the ineptitude of Mary Stewart - which Buchanan successfully exploited. Yet his attempt to clarify the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled by no means met with unanimous approval. Even when legitimated by reference to a popular national historical myth, Buchanan's arguments in favour of election and tyrannicide proved much too radical for the conservative susceptibilities of many of his fellow countrymen. Nevertheless, by couching his theory in a classicized variant of the language of the commonweal, Buchanan ensured that the constitutional issues which he raised were not simply ignored by his compatriots. In a sense, indeed, he initiated a debate on the nature of political obligation which preoccupied the Scots throughout the reigns of James VI and Charles I.

Yet influential as Buchanan's ideas remained even among the covenanters of the 1640's, it is clear that in the intervening years the terms of public discourse underwent a marked change. Buchanan's appeal to natural laws to underwrite his aristocratic constitutionalism was a form of argument ideally suited to a political culture whose legal and institutional framework was unsophisticated and ill-defined and whose social and political structure remained essentially medieval. But even as Buchanan wrote, social and political changes were occurring which would immeasurably enrich and diversify Scottish public culture and



radically alter the terms of political debate. In particular, in the post-Reformation period, those literate laymen to whom we have frequently referred would finally emerge as a distinct social grouping with power and status deriving from professional service in government, the legal establishment and the church. Moreover, as the kirk and the law developed into national institutions, their distinctive vocabularies ceased to be the preserve of the professionals themselves and became the property of the Scottish community at large. In short, by 1600 the comparative homogeneity of pre-Reformation public discourse had been lost and the language of the commonweal can no longer be described as the normative mode of Scottish political discourse. By that time, just as Scottish society had developed and diversified, so too had the political vocabularies in terms of which the Scots might describe and discuss their political experiences. The idea of the commonweal was as yet far from dead, but among so many competing claims its influence over the Scots was rapidly waning.

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